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MARIE MALIBRAN

MARIE MALIBRAN

THE STORY OF
A GREAT SINGER

BY

ARTHUR POUGIN

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PREFACE

Beauty, love, skill—these graced this woman's name,
Writ on her face and heart, limped in her voice!
Thus to her soul Heaven hath a threefold claim:
The earth laments; but thrice let Heaven rejoice.[1]

In this wise do the poets sing of the artists. In this wise did Lamartine sing of Mme. Malibran just when she had passed away, a victim in her youth to a dramatic accident the announcement of which had terrified Europe, taking away with her her secret of a voice and a mastery of pathos which had moved, enraptured and enthralled an entire generation of man.

Malibran—the very word is sonorous and harmonious, and well befitted the bearer of it who in her own person embodied the genius of dramatic song, and made her personality almost a theme for legend. No few great singers have remained famous, delighted their hearers, passed through the world amid claps of applause; and

[1] This quotation of Lamartine is not to be found in his published works. It is engraved on Marie Malibran's tomb in the cemetery of Laeken, near Brussels. For original French *vide* p. 313.

their names are still household words: Faustina Hasse, Gabrielli, Mara, Todi, Sophie Arnould, Saint-Huberty, Strinasacchi, Pasta, Pisaroni, Schroeder, Sontag, Grisi, Falcon, and very many others might be cited. In despite of their high standing, their undeniable talents, their successful careers and triumphs, not one of them has left such a brilliant trail across the skies, or enjoyed the extraordinary and immeasurable renown that lights up the memory of this incomparable singer, like an aureole. With this meteoric genius everything came, as glory does, early and swift. At the age of five she was on the stage, at seventeen she married, at twenty she was famous, at the beginning of her twenty-ninth year she died, after passing beyond the bounds of public enthusiasm and filling the world with the tale of her achievements.

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MARIE MALIBRAN

CHAPTER I

Manuel Garcia, her father: singer, composer and conductor in Spain, his country—Mme. Garcia, actress—Garcia comes to Paris, engaged at the Théâtre Italien, and succeeds—Birth of Marie-Félicité Garcia at Paris—Follows her father to Italy, and becomes the pupil of Panseron and Hérold—Her precociousness—Returns to France with her father, who trains her voice—Voyage to London—Start and first successes—Leaves for America, where Garcia takes his family to found an Italian opera at New York—New successes of Marie as a girl—Leaves the stage to marry the French banker Eugène Malibran—What Malibran was—Mysterious separation—Mme. Malibran returns to France

At the close of the eighteenth century and the dawn of the nineteenth, Spain was engaged in applauding a young artist of great powers and originality, who was already giving proof of a strong personality, although his talents were not as yet fully developed; he was destined to become one of the foremost, if not the foremost, singer of his day. This artist, whose family history is unknown, was one Manuel Garcia. It might almost be claimed for him that he disclosed to an astonished Europe what was the

real character intended by Mozart for his Don Juan ; and he was the title-character for whom Rossini derived the rôle of Almaviva in the *Barber of Seville.*

He was born at Seville, on January 22, 1775 ; at the age of six he was admitted into the choir at the Cathedral of Seville, and there received his musical education ; and it is almost certain that, at the age of sixteen, young Garcia was pretty generally known as a singer, composer and conductor. Later on, after receiving an appointment at the Cadiz Theatre, and then again at Madrid, to which town he returned once more after a short stay at Malaga, he earned himself applause for his fine voice, as well as for the talent he displayed in composing the score of certain *tonadillas*, a kind of vaudeville, which he himself used to play with spirit and ease. Next he set about composing several one- or two-act operas based on librettos, almost all of which were copied from French models ; and these had a great vogue, not only at Madrid, but also throughout Spain. For all this Garcia, who, as a singer, possessed a superb voice and a masterly feeling for drama, began to see that his own country could not give him the renown he hankered for and deserved. He must have a larger stage, and laid plans to betake himself

to Paris, where he arrived towards the end of the year 1806 or the beginning of 1807, together with his young wife, and his son Manuel, who was then about two years old.[1] After a short time he managed to secure an appointment at the Théâtre Italien (then called the Opéra Bouffe), and made a successful start at this theatre on February 11, 1808, in Paër's *Griselda*. "Only one month after coming on the stage at the Théâtre Italien," says Fétis, "he was appointed conductor of the choir, which consisted of distinguished artists whose singing was pure, but somewhat cold; Garcia warmed them up with his high spirits. Garat, a shrewd judge of the merits and defects of singers, then said of Garcia, 'I like the Andalusian fury of this man; it sets everything going.'"[2]

[1] Mme. Garcia was also an actress of the first rank, and, on the strength of this, had gained a very great reputation in her own country. Her maiden name was Joaquina Sichez; her stage-name Briones.

[2] This quotation from the lengthy notice Fétis assigns to Garcia in the *Biographie universelle des musiciens* is almost the only one dealing solely with him. But this notice is almost literally taken from an article published in *El Eco de Euterpe* (Barcelona, June, 1860). Any one who consults the badly edited but useful work of Baltasar Saldoni (*Diccionario biográfico-bibliográfico de efemérides de músicos españoles*, Madrid, 1866–1881, 4 vols. 8vo.) will be convinced of this fact. But Fétis intimates that Garcia became engaged at

It is well known what a brilliant career Garcia enjoyed in France (where he remained four years at first, and returned later on), in England, Italy and America, and how very well merited was the honour he sought for outside his own country. The fact also stands that he wanted to excel, not only as a singer, but as a composer as well; and though in the latter capacity he was not so fortunate, yet he managed, with some measure of success, to get produced a few French and Italian operas; amongst others at the French Opera-house, *La mort de Tasse* (1821) and *Floristan* (1822), at the Théâtre Italien *Il Califfo di-Bagdad* (1817), at the Opéra Comique *Le Prince d'Occasion* (1817) and *Les deux Contrats* (1824), and finally at the Gymnase a little play called *La Meunière* (1823). But my business is not Garcia's life-story. My object has been simply to sketch out rapidly the start of the career of the notable artist who was the father of that other notable artist, Marie Malibran, whose name should be inscribed in letters of fire in the history of art. But, in the first place, it is, at any rate, useful to

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the Théâtre Italien as soon as he arrived at Paris, whilst this article expressly states that he left for Paris at the end of 1806 or the beginning of 1807 (*á fines de 1806 ó principios de 1807*). Then, as we have seen, his first appearance was on February 11, 1808, at least a year after his arrival.

recall her parentage, to introduce the man who was her father and her teacher, to whom she certainly owed, besides her musical education, something of her artistic temperament, though she was so unlike him in character in so many ways and so many respects.

Marie-Félicité Garcia was born in Paris, and always boasted and gloried in the fact, as we shall see later on, for she adored France and deemed herself a Frenchwoman. She first saw the light of day in Paris, rue du Condé, No. 3, on March 24, 1808, six weeks after her father's first appearance at the Théâtre Italien. In the early part of 1811 he travelled to Italy, and she must have been three years old when she left France with him. Garcia repaired to Turin, then on to Naples, where he remained from 1812 to 1815. In 1813, at Naples, the child faced the footlights for the first time, and showed herself to the public in the part of the child in Paër's *Agnese* at the little theatre *dei Fiorentini.* This was a mere chance, nothing more. But very soon after she commenced the study of music seriously, curiously enough, together with two Frenchmen, Hérold and Panseron. Hérold had won the grand prize of Rome in 1812; and the latter succeeded him in the honour in 1813, and both hap-

pened to be at Naples in 1814. Naturally they and Garcia became friendly, both were attracted by the little girl, who already showed signs of her marvellous talent; and whilst Panseron began to teach her the solfeggi, Hérold gave her piano-lessons. She might well have lighted on worse professors, and it may be imagined that, what with her precocious intelligence and natural aptitude, this first initiation into the art bore swift fruit. But she soon had to leave Naples with her father, who returned to Paris to manage a season at the Théâtre Italien in 1816. She was barely eight years old, but all accounts agree that she could speak French, Spanish and Italian with fluency. The next year Garcia went to London, and remained there two years and a half; and she thus had an opportunity of acquiring English, which she did with like ease. This stay in England was also useful to her in enabling her to go on with the piano, which she studied with eagerness.

At last Garcia returned to Paris, and re-appeared on the boards of the Théâtre Italien on October 26, 1819, remaining there this time up to the year 1824; and a new existence began for his daughter, whose voice he soon began training. He was a great artist, but has

been ascribed a reputation of coarseness, brutal manners and frightful irritability. I cannot vouch for the fact; but this much is certain—and all the numerous evidence corroborates it absolutely—that he brought up his daughter with excessive sternness, was a severe father, often a hard master, exacting and impatient, not content to chide merely, when the child could not at once perfectly overcome the tasks he set her, and beating her pitilessly, in order to correct an involuntary slip, or to get the effect he wanted. They say that one day Paër with a friend was passing by beneath the windows of Garcia's house just when agonizing screams became audible; and, in reply to the friend's questions, Paër said with a smile: "It's only Garcia beating his daughter to teach her to get her beats and trills right; don't be frightened."

Countess Merlin, Mme. Malibran's great friend, tells some stories about this ill-treatment in her interesting book, which she dedicated to the great artist's memory.[1] "One evening I was

[1] *Les Loisirs d'une femme du monde*, par la Comtesse Merlin (Paris, Ladvocat, 1838, 2 vols. 8vo.). Countess Merlin was a distinguished lady of the time, whose *salon* was much sought after, at a period when there were *salons* in Paris. She was a Spaniard by birth, born at Havana, named Mercedes Jaruco, a niece of General O'Farrell, who was the Spanish Minister of War under King Joseph Bonaparte.

studying a duet with Maria. Garcia wrote out a passage and told her to execute it. Maria tried, failed, desponded, and said to her father, 'I can't do it.' The Arabic blood of the Andalusian boiled over; he glared at his daughter. 'What was that?' Maria looked at him, shuddered, clasped her hands, and said in a flustered voice, 'I will do it, papa.' And she performed the passage at once perfectly. She told me afterwards that she could not conceive how that passage had been done: 'Papa's look,' she added, 'so affects me that I could jump down from the fifth storey into the street without coming by any harm.'"

There are always reasons to excuse a fault of omission or commission; and one day Garcia told the Countess, who was blaming him for his severity towards his daughter: "Yes, I am blamed for my conduct, I know; I can't help it. Maria can only become a great artist at this price. Her firm char-

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She married a Frenchman, and thus became French by nationality: and in Paris she at once gained prominence in high society. She had had lessons from Garcia—a fact which explains her affection for his daughter—and could sing, not amateurishly, but really like a great artist. She also wrote with grace and facility, and in 1836 Sainte-Beuve published an encomium of her, *Souvenirs d'une Créole*, which had just come out.

acter can only be daunted or led by a hand of iron. . . ."

This much is certain ; the poor little mite was very unhappy, and her father's behaviour towards her could not but influence the subsequent growth of her character. This fact used especially to be considered the causes of those fits of sudden melancholy that would seize her quite suddenly without any apparent reason. But Countess Merlin is once again our authority for the singular results of this strange method of education.

"One evening I was occupying a box above the stage, and looked down on to her. I saw her beautiful eyes in which passion and sorrow gleamed through, the long-drawn tears softly pouring down the pale cheeks, and cried out of sympathy, my breast heaved ; the fibres of my heart thrilled to every tone of her voice . . . . When we left the theatre, whilst I was still under the spell of her divine genius, I asked her : 'Maria, how is it you sing so well and weep at the same time? Doesn't the true emotion of your voice hurt the intonation, and the purity of the sound?' 'I never needed to study for this effect,' she replied quite simply ; 'as a child, I so often cried whilst I was having my lesson ; and I was so frightened that papa would

notice it that I would hide behind him; and, by and by, I unconsciously got into the way of controlling the sound of my voice, whilst my tears were flowing.'" Thus the inexorability of the father had all helped to increase Marie's talent.

But this brutal education might have produced quite other results than what Garcia looked for. Still, thanks to the girl's splendid training, as also to her special aptitude, artistic nature, her courage and energy, she became, almost before she entered on her 'teens, the wonderful professional whom the world noises, the absolute mistress of her voice, which she could coerce to obey her and produce whatever effect she desired, which she could subdue to her will, even in the most irksome circumstances, at the cost sometimes of frantic pain. Yet, sonorous, resounding and grand as her voice was, it was not flexible, and she had had to supple it; the range was extraordinary, but was only won by dogged and severe drudgery; the metal was pure, but had to be made adjustable by skilled and assiduous toil. In a word, her wonderful voice was not all mere nature; and the artist had only subdued it to complete subserviency by effort, exertions and patience, and the possession of an indomitable

will, working together with high intelligence and a quite exceptional sense of music.

However this may be, Garcia had in 1829 left the Theâtre Italien in Paris to return to London, and the moment was drawing near when, all at once, his daughter was to commence that astonishing career of a ten years' series of ceaseless triumphs, unparalleled, undreamed of, until then. Garcia was engaged as principal tenor at the King's Theatre,[1] which had just then undergone considerable alterations. This house then had a group of famous vocalists, the combination of which was bound to ensure success. These were Mme. Pasta, Mme. Ronzi de Begnis, Mme. Caradori-Allan, and Mme. Vestris. But, at one time, owing to a number of various causes, it was so unprovided that the repertory must have been stopped if some artist were not discovered ready to come forward at once before the public. This stopgap to save the situation proved to be Garcia's young daughter, who up to now had only been heard in subordinate parts and as an under-study. Even thus, she had not passed unnoticed, if one may accept an amusing and characteristic story

[1] In the Haymarket. For a history of this theatre, *vide* Chap. I of *Seven Years of the King's Theatre*, by John Ebers (1828).

told by Countess Merlin : " Her appearance on the King's Theatre was marked by a delightful episode, which serves to prove the high ambitions that were stirring in her soul, and her contemptuous disregard of obstacles, which also was displayed on the first occasion. She was to sing with Velluti a duet in Zingarelli's *Romeo and Juliet.* In the morning they rehearsed it together. At that rehearsal the *musico*,[1] like an old stager, sang the simple note and reserved his graces for the evening, fearing Maria might mimic them. When they came on the stage, Velluti sang his solo first, and overloaded it with ornamentation ; then, towards the end, a new and brilliant passage carried the audience off their feet. The look of triumph and compassion on the face of the *musico* was turned on Maria, when she, like a gamecock, dashed on to the stage, imitated the very embellishments of Velluti, gave them a new turn, and crowned her triumph with a grand bold improvisation. At once, and in the midst of the bewilderment of her senses by the loud applause, she felt—what ?—an iron grip which pinched her arm above the elbow, and instantly afterwards, the word *briccona*[2] angrily whispered

[1] In Italian this word means male soprano singer.
[2] Minx.

by her companion in a low tone betrayed who had struck the blow, and taught her an early lesson that there is no glory without some after-taste of bitterness. I know of no singer, however great the reputation and professional skill, who would be capable of venturing on such a feat like the one this young girl carried out that evening. Maria was not sixteen, and this was her first appearance on the stage."

But, obviously, this first appearance came in by a side wind, and the youthful artist soon was to enter the domain of the stage more thoroughly and seriously. Fétis, in describing her real first initiation, says: "An illness of Mme. Pasta hastened on her appearance on the stage. In two days she learned all the *récitatifs* in the *Barber of Seville*, of which she already knew the principal turns, and on June 7, 1825, she played the part of Rosina in the King's Theatre." If Fétis' facts are accurate, the same cannot be said of the causes she alleges. One John Ebers, a publisher, was at this time, from 1821 to 1828, director of the King's Theatre, and in the year we are speaking of, 1828, he published a monograph dealing with his directorate, called *Seven Years of the King's Theatre*. In this book Ebers, who had no great liking for Garcia's talents, as we shall

see later on, thus describes Marie's first appearance: "Mme. Pasta, who was the great favourite, only came for a limited number of performances. About this time Mme. Ronzi fell ill and completely lost her voice, so much so that she was obliged to cancel her engagement and return to Italy. Mme. Vestris having retired, and Mme. Caradori finding it impossible to play for some time, some young and fresh singer had positively to be engaged, and this was the daughter of the tenor Garcia, who had been acting in London for some seasons. She was still a simple young girl, who had never acted on a public stage; but, from her first appearance, she betrayed true talent both in singing and acting. Her great youth, her gentle mien, her pleasant voice, and lightness and quickness of play as Rosina in the *Barber of Seville* (in which she started) gained her the favour of the public. But it was out of all measure to speak of her as a *prima donna* when she was mere *débutante*, full of promise; maybe, likely, with time, hard work, training, and the instruction given by her father, to rise to the highest positions in her profession. In him she had a good musician for teacher, though I incline to think his a very unpleasant voice. Next year she went with all

of her family (all of whom, young and old, sing), *tant bons que mauvais*[1] to establish an Italian Opera in America. There she married, and will probably never be seen again in England, even if she return to Europe."

Under such conditions then did Marie Garcia make her first bow on the stage. Ebers, whilst he praises her, is not over-enthusiastic. But it is certain that from the very first the English public succumbed to the spell of the young artist, as another writer states: "No real music-appreciator can forget the delicious effect of her first public performance at the Opera, where her graceful figure, expressive features and melodious voice gave the music an altogether novel and fresh charm." Anyhow, the fact is that immediately after her first appearance Ebers engaged her for the rest of the season, which lasted about six weeks longer, for £500. On July 23 Mlle. Garcia acted in another opera, *Il Crociato* of Meyerbeer, taking the part of Felicia. In this rôle she was as happy as in the *Barber of Seville*, and earned especial applause for the pretty trio *giovinetto cavaliere*, which she sang with consummate grace. And so great was her success that at the close of the

[1] All the foreign words in this quotation are French in the original.

theatrical season she was called away, together with her father, to sing at several provincial towns in the great festivals to which the English public is so partial, when the most illustrious artists meet. In these circumstances she performed at Manchester, York and Liverpool.

Meanwhile Garcia had been for some time nursing a scheme the execution of which he could not delay. The project was carried out, and had a considerable influence on his daughter's fate. The proposal was to try and acclimatize Italian opera in the United States, where, up to that time, any such representation was unknown. He had made arrangements with the Park Theatre in New York[1] to have it reserved for him for two performances a week, and it was there he intended to make this bold start. What with his wife, his daughter Marie, his son Manuel and himself, he possessed the nucleus of an excellent company, and he supplemented it by adding such artists as Angrisani, Crivelli junior, Rosich, and Mme. Barbieri. He assembled his little troop, and was ready to embark in the early autumn of 1825. He set sail from Liverpool together

[1] This theatre was built on the site now occupied by the office of the hugest newspaper in America and the world, the *New York Herald.*

with his colleagues, and probably arrived at New York in the beginning of November.

On the 29th of that same month Garcia's company made its appearance on the stage of the Park Theatre, with a first production of the *Barber of Seville*, in which the parts were assigned as follows :—[1]

ROSINA, *Maria Garcia.*
BERTA, *Mme. Garcia.*
ALMAVIRA, *Garcia senior.*
DON BASILIO, *Angrisani.*
BARTOLO, *Rosich.*
FIGARO, *Manuel Garcia junior.*
FIORILLO, *Crivelli.*

It is impossible, over here, to gain access to

[1] Carlo Angrisani, a singer with a fine bass voice and an excellent musician, was already rather old at this time, if, as his biographers say, he was born at Reggio about 1760. He had been successful as *basso cantante* in the great cities of Italy and at Vienna, and in 1817 belonged to the King's Theatre in London, where he came to know Garcia. He had tried his hand at composing, and had published two collections of nocturnes in three voices. Domenico Crivelli was the son of the famous tenor, Gaetano Crivelli, and was born at Brescia, on June 7, 1793. He was also both a singer and a composer, and had been the pupil of Millico, Fenaroli and Zingarelli. Later on he became professor of singing in the Naples Conservatoire. He died on February 11, 1857. He published a good manual of singing, several profane and religious compositions, and wrote an opera which never saw the light. Facts are lacking about Mme. Barbieri, and Rosich, who played the bass comic parts.

the originals, in order to get exact and detailed information. But all of the chroniclers and biographers echo the American journals of the time, and concur in saying that the foreign artists were amazingly successful at New York, and that the greatest share in this triumph was borne by Marie Garcia, who, at the tender age of seventeen, took over on to her shoulders all the burdensome part of the repertory, and was already showing the first proofs of the talent that was thereafter to render her celebrated. The plays included : *Otello*, *La Donna del Lago*, *Cenerentola*, *Semiramide*, *Don Giovanni*, *Tancredi*, *Il Turco in Italia*, *Romeo e Giulietta*, without reckoning two works Garcia composed for his daughter, *L'Amante astuto*, and *La Figlia dell' aria*.

I have already said that with a legendary figure like Mme. Malibran's, the biographer must be on his guard against certain anecdotes and tales, which eventually enhanced this fabulous character, and clothed her person with a touch of the stupendous, of something superhuman almost, and miraculous. In connection with this stay in America, a curious story became common property, and was so widely circulated that Legouvé himself thought he ought to lay hold of it and reproduce it in

his interesting monograph on the celebrated artist.[1] I reproduce it as Legouvé told it:—

"It was at New York. Garcia entered his daughter's room, and said to her in the voice that made everyone quail before him: 'On Saturday you are to make your appearance with me in *Otello*.'

"'Saturday, why, it's only six days ahead!'

"'I know all about that.'

"'Six days in which to rehearse a part like Desdemona's, and to accustom myself to being on the stage!'

"'Don't talk nonsense. On Saturday you are to appear, and you will excel, or, if not, in the final scene, when I am supposed to be striking you with a dagger, I will really stab you!'

"Such arguments were irresistible. She went through her rehearsals, she played the part, her success was enormous, and the final effect took a turn which was quite unexpected, especially for her father. Those who have seen Mme. Malibran play Desdemona can recollect what a new character she gave her heroine. Mme. Pasta was sublime in it, but she was taking the part of a girl of twenty. Mme.

[1] *Maria Malibran*, by Ernest Legouvé. Paris, Hetzel, s.d., 48 pp.

Malibran acted the character like a girl of sixteen. She was, indeed, a very young girl herself. This fact produced a delicious spell of innocence, of pathetic weakness, of girlish ingenuousness, broken by outbursts of indignation or terror that made the whole assembly shudder. In the last scene, in which Othello marches on Desdemona, dagger in hand, Mme. Pasta used to walk back facing the attack, strong in her virtue and courage: but Mme. Malibran used to run away, as though she were lost, dashed up to the windows, the doors, and scampered about the room like a frightened young doe. On the night of her first appearance, when her father seized her in the act of fleeing, and dragged her by her arm, she entered so absolutely into her double character of daughter and actress, the terrifying expression of her father's squinting eyes seemed to her so much like a sentence of death, that she held up the hand which was descending on her, bit it and drew blood. Garcia moaned aloud for pain, and this was taken as a shriek of rage. The act came to an end amid a storm of cheers."

But there are several points that make me doubtful of the truth of this anecdote. First of all, I must observe that Garcia's company

did not start its selection at New York with *Otello*, as Legouvé believed, but as we have seen, with the *Barber of Seville;* secondly, a member of the De Bériot family[1] has asserted to me positively that the facts contained in this tale, and often cited, were sheer inventions; finally, as regards the incident of this particular production of *Otello*, I note that Countess Merlin gives quite a different account of it, probably equally unreliable. Maria Garcia was no happier with her father in America than she had been in Europe; and this was, as we shall see, one of the determining causes of her marriage. Starting from this basis, Countess Merlin tells the story in her fashion, as follows: "Home life had become stormy. Mme. Garcia was mild in disposition, and, like a good angel, tried to allay her husband's savage temper: but the tempest brewed more and more strongly every day. One night, they were playing *Otello*. Violent scenes had taken place that morning. Maria was taking the part of Desdemona, and her father that of the Moor. Just when the latter, his muscles standing out, his eyes all a-sparkle, was approaching

[1] The famous violinist Charles de Bériot. We shall hear more of him later. He became Mme. Malibran's second husband.

his mistress to kill her, Maria noticed that the dagger which was glistening in her father's hands was real. She recognised the weapon; the blade was sharp; her father had purchased it of a Turk, and, a few days before, examined it in her presence. Maria already was feeling the cold steel entering her breast. She was frightened out of her wits, and exclaimed, 'Papá, papá, por Diós, no me mates!'[1] There was nothing in it, as may be imagined: the property poignard had been smashed, and Garcia had merely substituted his own."

In this version the incident becomes almost dramatic in character. But, I repeat, there is no reason to regard this account of it as any more credible than the other.

Garcia's company continued its productions at New York twice a week for nine months, *i.e.* up to August 1826, with unvarying success. Nevertheless Garcia was soon obliged to leave North America, "the rigour of the climate," says one biographer, "proving itself harmful to the singers' throats." However queer this explanation seems, it is certain he departed from New York to go with his whole company to Mexico, where he stayed about a year and a half, and thence returned to Europe,

[1] "For God's sake, do not kill me!"

not without becoming the victim of a tragic event, which his Spanish biographer thus describes: "After residing for eighteen months in the capital of Mexico, he felt the need of rest, and wanted to come back to Europe; he got together all his valuables, and started for Vera Cruz, where he intended to embark; but on the road his party was held up and pillaged by a band of brigands who robbed him of all he had, and, amongst other things of consequence, of a cash-box containing one thousand ounces of gold."

But, when Garcia proceeded to Mexico, he left his daughter behind him at New York. She had rescued herself from his brutality by marrying; and had ceased to form part of his troop. The precise facts leading up to the marriage are somewhat obscure, because it was contracted in America, and it is rather difficult to ascertain them exactly. This much is known, that François Eugène Malibran, a French banker, had established himself in New York, fallen in love with Mlle. Garcia; and that she, despite the tremendous disparity of age (he was forty-five and she seventeen), did not reject his proposal.[1] There were, it is

[1] He was born in Paris on November 14, 1781. The Malibran family originally came from the French Pyrenees,

said, two reasons. The first is, that, in spite of the success she had attained in America, she had fallen temporarily into a strange dislike for the stage—which she was afterwards to love, almost to dote upon—and that the first result of the new union was to make her abandon a career she for the time being loathed. The second reason, and, perhaps, the stronger motive, was her keen desire to marry herself out of the violent despotism of her father, who continued to assert his sway over her in the most cruel and painful manner. Malibran's position seemed very good in everybody's eyes, and, apparently, it was a very excellent match. Garcia, who was at first very reluctant, finally gave his consent, and granted his daughter a

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where they were settled in the eighteenth century. Pierre Louis Malibran, the father of Eugène, had gone to reside as a merchant at Cadiz, and there married in 1761 Maria des Anges de Santiváñez. He left Cadiz in 1781 and removed to Paris. He had seven children, three sons and four daughters, the sixth eldest being born at Cadiz, and the youngest, Eugène, at Paris. Of the two elder sons, one, John, went to Paris in 1792, entered the army, became a lieutenant in the seventh half-brigade, afterwards staff-captain to the Italian army. He died without issue at Trinidad in Cuba. The second, Peter, was a planter at Trinidad (Cuba), and died there in 1840, leaving his two sons and four daughters a considerable fortune. These detailed facts I have got from a descendant of the family.

dowry of £2,000. In short, after a few encounters in the family, the marriage was agreed to, and celebrated in the presence of the French consul at New York on March 23, 1826, the eve of Mlle. Garcia's eighteenth birthday.

But, whilst taking up a new life, and leaving her father to gain a husband, the poor girl had only effected a change of misery, as she too soon apprehended. In reality, and despite her great attractiveness, it is said that Malibran, in making his suit for her, had his eye on business, and on nothing more, aiming at the dowry of £2,000. If we can go by all that has been said on this topic, the position of this so-called banker, which everyone believed to be very prosperous and secure, was, on the contrary, in most desperate straits : the £2,000 enabled him, for the moment, to put off his creditors ; but, only a few months later, his repute had vanished away, and he was declared insolvent. Some even assert he was imprisoned on this account. I will not undertake to clear up this doubtful question, and content myself with stating the facts as they are reported.

But try and conceive the circumstances, the moral position and material prospects of the wretched young wife. Tied up to a husband whom she could not love, on account of his

age, whose behaviour towards her precluded any respect, separated from her family (which, as we have seen, had travelled as far as Mexico), still further removed from Europe, whither she felt every call to return, she was left without any moral link, with no friend, almost resourceless, and hopeless of the future. Then, no doubt, for the first time in her life, her decision of character and energy (which she was to prove so often in the years to come) had an opportunity for asserting itself. In fact, she made up her mind to leave America, and return to France, the country she loved best; and, once she had resolved on the step, she did not delay in carrying it out. But what were the conditions under which she separated from her husband? It is difficult to ascertain. This much is undeniable, that she set sail, all by herself, from New York, towards the end of October 1827, and arrived at Paris about the beginning of December.

CHAPTER II

Arrives at Paris—Finds a home with husband's sisters—Her relations with Countess Merlin—Brilliant start at Théâtre Italien—Triumph in extraordinary production at Opera—Mme. Malibran and the critics—Adaptability and variety of talent—Constant improvement

MME. MALIBRAN'S conduct had been so irreproachable, so utterly beyond disparagement by any carping tongue, that, when she reached Paris, she first found a hospitable home with her husband's family. It was at the home of her two sisters-in-law that she sought refuge; one of them, Mme. Chastelain, was a widow with two sons and two daughters, and the other was a spinster. In this house she passed several months before becoming completely independent.

The scant details that can be discovered relating to the early days of her residence in Paris after her return from America are all to be found in Countess Merlin's interesting book, which is the only authority for any history of the famous artist put at any length, and from an intimate and friendly point of view; but it

must be noted that this work is in many respects inaccurate, as the authoress did not sufficiently verify her recollections. This is her account of her young friend's arrival :—

"Maria was not quite twenty years old when she arrived in Paris in December 1827. She went to stay with M. Malibran's sister. Although she was born in Paris, the seclusion to which her studies and her extreme youth had subjected her, had precluded her from entering into any friendships in that city. Thus, coming back after some years' interval, she was utterly isolated. The remembrance of my liking for her in her childhood induced her to call on me. The poor girl, an outcast in Paris from beyond the seas, had then no guide, no protector, no money, was almost destitute; and she came to see me, a vision of fine dark silky hair, which fell in long curls on her shoulders, in a short narrow muslin dress, with beautiful eyes, lips eloquent of strength and youth, twenty years old, and talented beyond measure. The sight was almost too much for me: pity and admiration surged across my heart. I set her down to the piano, and loved her on the spot.

". . . A few days later, one morning I assembled at my house a sort of judicial bench of

musicians, consisting in part of the unconverted. As I anticipated, they were at once astonished and delighted at seeing and hearing her. Maria's scenic talent was indubitable, but her real triumph was in the improvisations she would give in private. Then, free to work out her own ideas, she incarnated the genius of music. The opulence of inventiveness, and the exquisite taste she showed when she gave an air a new life, bedecking it with endless delicate turns, or colours as lively and brilliant as the hues of the rainbow! . . . Very soon she so thrilled her audience as to transport them up from earth, and set them walking in the clouds. For the mind was exalted to the higher sphere. . . ."

Mme. Malibran thus performed on several occasions in the popular *salon* of Countess Merlin, and also in the *salon* of Countess Meroni. These private triumphs preluded those she was not to fail of achieving in the public eye; and were so widely noised about that the Opera was stirred into action, and was contemplating engaging the young singer: they had already made a proposal. The sudden departure of Mlle. Cinti (Mme. Damoreau) from the Opera-house had caused them some

embarrassment; Fétis, who vouches for this fact, wrote in the *Revue Musicale* to this effect:—

"Singers of the kind of Mlle. Cinti are few and far between. One such is coming forward; Mme. Malibran, the daughter of Garcia; she has recently arrived at Paris. She has remarkable talents; and her former long stays at Paris in her childhood has made her a master of French; but the terms she demands are, they say, somewhat too heavy for the managers: £2,000 salary with four months' leave. She has been offered, so I hear on good authority, £1,400 and four months' leave. If an arrangement cannot be made on these conditions, I should be inclined to recommend acceding to all of Mlle. Garcia's requirements, so as to secure some one who shall provide for the prospects of the theatre and make a hit. But I know that such examples may be interpreted as precedents, for, after indispensable artists, there come the serviceable ones, who also can make their claims. This progressive increase in artists' salaries is a great bane, which tends to ruin theatrical enterprise; but there is no cure for the evil, which results from the scarcity of the supply, but to take measures designed to train large numbers of vocalists."

But, before ever she signed any articles, Mme. Malibran was to enjoy a great public triumph. Just then, a great musical event was being arranged at the Opera, a performance for the benefit of the great singer Galli,[1] for which her co-operation was asked for and willingly accorded. This production was given on January 14, 1828, by both the Italian artists and the English in combination: these two companies were then jointly playing at the Salle Favart. The programme included *Semiramide*, acted by Mme. Pisaroni (Arsace) and Mme. Malibran (Semiramis), two acts of *Romeo and Juliet* (together with Miss Smithson), and one act of the *Barber of Seville* with Mlle. Sontag.

The contents of the play-bill was alone sufficient to make the mouths of the public water; but the great attraction for them was the presence of Mme. Malibran. It was known that foreign capitals were anxious to get her, that London, in especial, had made glowing offers, and people crowded to hear her, fearing they would have no other opportunity. Hence, the attendance was exceptional at the Opera for this special reason. Nor were the expecta-

[1] Galli, at this time, was one of the most remarkable and favourite actors at the Théâtre Italien.

tions of the audience disappointed. Although Mme. Malibran had to sing against no less formidable a rival, as Arsace, than the great singer, Mme. Pisaroni, she made a peerless Semiramis, and her success was enormous, spontaneous and unimaginable. It became something more than enthusiasm, almost frenzy. Her beauty, youthful years, and her genius, turned everyone's head; and the next day her name was on the lips of all.

After such an ovation it was thought she might go to the Opera, but it all came to nothing. She definitely declined all the offers that this house made to her, and preferred to accept those of the Théâtre Italien, where she signed articles for £2,000 for the season (according to others, £3,000), together with a benefit. It will be well worth our while to follow her career, step by step, during this season, to watch her talent and her personal popularity ratifying themselves unequivocally, to trace her progress in every part that she undertook, almost performance after performance, to see how her command of the public grew day by day, and her victory attained to proportions that might be called heroic. I shall do this by making passing note of the criticisms and judgments that were pronounced upon her, becoming more and more

favourable, and culminating in the sincerest and most enthusiastic flattery. And do not let us forget that it was Paris, it was France, that set her on her throne—as she ever after remembered—that, no doubt, it was the refined taste of the Parisian public which enabled her to purge herself of certain faults and flaws that still marred the perfection of her incomparable talent : thus, a peculiar interest belongs to this first part of her career, and to the estimate which critics then made of the nature of this talent, and the brilliant prospects in store.[1]

It goes without saying that Mme. Malibran's first appearance was awaited impatiently and was a real event. On April 8, 1828, she took her place at the Théâtre Italien in that same rôle of Semiramis, which she had just acted so superbly. On April 15 she was playing *Otello*, on the 22nd the *Barber of Seville*, on May 1 *Cenerentola*, and, a few days later, *Romeo and*

[1] One singular fact may be cited at this juncture. The year before Mme. Malibran's arrival at Paris, a young singer, called Mlle. Garcia, appeared at the Théâtre Italien, with very different results. She made her first bow on May 8, 1827, in a little-known opera of Rossini's, *Torvaldo e Dorliska :* subsequently she acted in *Tebaldo ed Isolina*, and, later on, in *Tancredi*, and failed in them all. Who was this Mlle. Garcia, of whom nothing more is heard, and who had nothing to do with Mme. Malibran's family except the identity of the name?

Juliet. She did not let the grass grow under her feet. Fétis, who followed her career very attentively, thus speaks of her success in the part of Semiramis :—

"Loud cheers burst out after Mme. Malibran had sung the air *Bel raggio lusinghier.* The beauty of her voice and face, the varied expression, justified this public testimony of gratification; but, for all that, I noted some florid turns which seemed to me unsuitable to the character of the passage, and betrayed more of ostentation than of artistic feeling. But, in the following duet (*Serba mi' onor*), the singer attained a perfectly pure and, at the same time, most brilliant style. The charming manner, in which she minced and displayed expression, is a real innovation in the art of singing. This invention, which is her own, must, unless I be mistaken, mean great successes for her to come, and confers a peculiar note on her talent. It is hard to imagine anything more beautiful than this duet, as it was sung, at Mme. Malibran's second performance, by herself and Mme. Pisaroni.

"The throne scene was the occasion of a new triumph for Mme. Malibran; the breadth of her style in the *récitatif*, the novel expressive

manner in which she did the quintet *Quel mesto gemito*, and the sense of proportion she managed to show in this great scene, fully justified the applause she received. Unfortunately she evidently became tired in the final movement, especially in the *Tutti*, and in the verse, *Tutto annunzia de' Numi il furore.* Obviously Mme. Malibran was saving herself for the second act, but the effectiveness of the passage was plainly spoiled.

"In the two duets of the second act, *Se la vita ancor t'è cara* and *Ebben'! a te ferisci*, Mme. Malibran managed to recover most of her strength: it was only towards the conclusion of the latter that her fatigue was once again noticeable; but, this time, she was completely successful, *although, perhaps, the public may not realize what is the range of this singer's powers.* For myself, I foretell her a brilliant reputation, if her health improve, for Nature has bestowed on her all that constitutes great talent; experience will do the rest."

Mme. Malibran was no less happy in *Otello*, in which the memory of Mme. Pasta was still warm and breathing. Fétis remarks:—

"She has been completely successful in the part of Desdemona, one of the most difficult

in Italian opera. The range of her voice, embracing at once the fine contralto chords with those of a high soprano, enables her to vary the tone of episodes, so as to give them a quite new and special character. I shall not quote any one in particular, because, I think, she appeared to me equally good in all. That fine phrase, *Se 'l padre m'abbandoni* in the *finale* used to be rendered by Mme. Pasta with intense poignancy, and taken by Mlle. Sontag in a childish manner very different from what the author intended; but Mme. Malibran interpreted it with truly remarkable energy and vigour. In the last duet she worked in combination all the powers of her personality and voice, and brought the enthusiasm of the public to its highest pitch.

"The public which, up to that time, had been reserving their impression of Mme. Malibran, have apparently been irretrievably conquered by *Otello*, and have at last recognized all the power of this gifted artist. What confirms my conviction of Mme. Malibran's future pre-eminence over other singers is the great improvement I notice in her taste. Every day her taste becomes purer, more deliberate; and, already, she does not abuse the faculties with which Nature has endowed her. She now

shows an ambition, not to do a great deal, but to do it well. If she go on with this line of action, she will soon have no rivals."

After playing these two tragic moving parts of Semiramis and Desdemona, Mme. Malibran next appeared before the public in the rebellious, girlish, light part of Rosina in the *Barber of Seville;* and it is extraordinary to note how she could transform herself, and play this rôle, which is so divergent from the two preceding, with all the proper gait and fitting colour, so as to gratify every taste and gain as great a victory. It is from another critic that I quote this time, to prove her success :—

"As soon as she appeared in the *Barber of Seville*, one was struck by the novelty and correctness of Rosina's national dress. Generally speaking she was the cause of a reformation, with regard to costume, at the Théâtre Italien, where this department of art had been so much neglected. Then when the new actress in this part was heard, it was a further surprise : instead of a strong and amorous Rosina, she gave us a little simpering maid full of grace, delicacy and ingenuousness. It was a real creation ; and her devotees admired her all the more in this unexpected attire, for having already

invested Desdemona with more love and terror and meek melancholy; but, then, one of the characteristics of Mme. Malibran's talent is her amazing variety: she always changes with the character she is playing, always the same with the naturalness she imparts to it. In the lesson-scene she made a great point by her remarkable skill as a pianist, and especially by her happy choice of Cabello's famous air: *Yo que soy contrabandista.* . . . In short, the character of Rosina enables her to make full use of the fortunately flexible voice Nature has given her, and to sing both in soprano and contralto; she also has been able to bring in many novel interpretations, which the censorious cannot refrain from admiring, in her acting, and a singer less gifted could not venture on, without facing certain failure."[1]

After acting in the *Barber of Seville* she appeared in *Cenerentola* [Cinderella], where she showed herself lovable, dainty and graceful. Then, she resumed tragedy, and took the part of Romeo in Zingarelli's *Romeo e Giulietta.* This was a bold venture, after the vivid recollection, which some deemed ineffaceable, which Mme. Pasta had left behind her in playing

[1] *Biographie universelle et portative des contemporains.*

this character. Hence, despite the eminence Mme. Malibran had won in the eyes of the public, they were a little shy; but her fellow-artists gave her her full due at once. "Mme. Malibran was rather hoarse," says Fétis, "but her strength of nerve and her genius made nothing of this hindrance, especially in the second and third act. In the stead of Sigismondo's air, which had been taken by Mme. Pasta in this piece, she sang a song of Mercadante's so perfectly as to deserve the highest praise. In the fourth scene, she apparently did not utter one phrase that was not sheer inspiration. For the first time, she let the fine contralto chords of her voice ring out with all of their force, and made a most notable use of them. Her spirit and conviction stood firm against the coldness of the public, and this was no small achievement in itself. She must go on and not be damped; when our kindly public comes to understand they can applaud without compromising themselves, they will render her back all her due, with interest to boot." Or again, some days later, after the second performance: "Mme. Malibran, her self-confidence set aglow, and undaunted by her chilly reception from the audience, excelled herself at the second per-

formance of *Romeo.* Her voice was more under control, purer in tone, and did not thwart her inspired rendering, which, as singers and the best judges testify, was as splendid as the execution."

In fine, Fétis brings a real feeling of admiration to bear on this subject when he returns to it anew and is speaking of Mme. Malibran in *Romeo:* this time the public had been won over by the performer :—

"What I had foreseen has proved true about Mme. Malibran in the last performances of *Romeo:* after keeping their feelings in check against her talents, which this singer displays in this rôle, the public give way to their admiration. Last Tuesday night the cheering was almost frantic: it is true that Mme. Malibran was better than she had been on the first occasion. For one thing, the hoarseness which had hindered her using her full resources, had disappeared; and also that kind of sympathy which is essential if any one is to reach the highest peak of excellence in dramatic entertainment, had been created between the audience and the singer; and she, having cast off all timidity, gave free vein to all of her inspiration.

"Mme. Malibran's improvement is stupendous. When she began, her singing was disfigured by an excess of ornamentation, admirably carried out, but in bad taste. One had only to mention this fault, and she instantly grasped the proper limit of the use of *fioriture*. She desired them more and more every day, and hence selected them all the better. Nature has endowed her with a quick imagination and vigorous feelings, and she is always devising new forms, some of which are vast, but most are happy. And yet, as I have already said, she is not twenty years old. For her to overtop all the singers of the present age, she only need travel for two or three years in the principal cities of Europe."

Evidently Mme. Malibran—and this is the secret of all great artists—went on trying hard day by day, ever endeavouring to better yesterday's achievement. Fétis is wrong in stating that she was not twenty at the time he spoke of her in such warm terms, but she was not much older than twenty. And it really is a tremendous thing to see an artist so young not only give proof of musical qualities of a very high order, not only combine with this exceptional equipment a dramatic talent that

excited admiration and wonder, but also—and this is the greatest marvel—manifest so much versatility and variety in her vocal execution, and in her interpretation of her piece, be now able to move to tears and pathos, almost to despair, and then again be light-hearted, brisk and merry to the pitch of madness; for her to-day to act Semiramis, Desdemona or Romeo, and to-morrow Cinderella or Rosina or any other similar character. It was not even one of the least curious features of her great talent that she could so readily lend herself to any style, appear in any guise. And, as she was helped in this respect by the nature of her voice, the vast range of which gave her the singular power of excelling as a soprano, or as a contralto, later on she used to like making special efforts, by taking in succession in the same piece parts utterly diverse, differing both in quality of voice, and in musical and dramatic execution. In serious rôles she was not content to play *Tancredi*, *Fidelio*, *Norma*, *l'Puritani*, or, in comedy, only, the *Barber of Seville*, *Cenerentola*, *L'Elisir d'Amore*, *il Matrimonio Segreto:* but in *Don Juan* she would come forward now as Anna, or Zerlina: in *Semiramide*, now as the Queen, or as Arsace, and in *Otello*, now as Desdemona, and then, again, as

Othello himself. Malibran as Othello was something of a freak. I have no qualms in acknowledging it was something of a puppet performance, I might almost say, in this experiment, if to apply such an expression to a singer so supreme and so great were not almost slighting and thus unjust. But what stands out is that all these feats demonstrate a personality of really extraordinary talent, exuberant in every meaning and implication of the word, on whom Nature had showered gifts so precious and so various; a character possessing an artistic sense of rare intenseness, which was sharpened and refined and made complete by an intellect so lofty, as never to lag half-way, or be dazed, and was able to divine what it had never been taught.

CHAPTER III

Leaves husband's family and stays with Countess de Sparre (Mlle. Naldi)—Returns to Théâtre Italien—Enthusiasm of public—Plays a new opera, *Clari*, by Halèvy, and a new triumph—Engaged at King's Theatre, London, and amazing success—Salaries at this time.

On July 1 Mme. Malibran gave her last performance at the Théâtre Italien. This consisted of the first act of the *Barber of Seville* and two last acts of *Otello*, and was her benefit. The enthusiasm for her she had excited in her audience was indescribable, and was translated into plaudits, calls, ovations of every sort, and a rain of bouquets. But after a season so strenuous and busy, the singer, who had herself undergone frightful exertions of mind and body and terrible fatigue, felt the need of some rest, which was really an absolute necessity. She went to stay at the Château de Brizay, the country house of Countess de Sparre, a kindly friend and charming woman, who, though she had left the world of activity, was, none the less, a distinguished singer.

Countess de Sparre was the daughter of a

singer in light opera, called Naldi, with whom Garcia had worked in London, when both were members of the same company at the King's Theatre. They met again in Paris in 1819, at the Théâtre Italien; and Garcia was, in 1820, the involuntary cause of his friend's death. Fétis thus relates the anecdote: "He died, accidentally, at the house of his friend, the famous singer, Garcia, who had asked him round to test a new kind of saucepan, called an *autoclave*. Naldi closed and locked the valve of this apparatus, and the concentrated steam burst, wrecked the room, and killed Naldi instantaneously, he being struck by the exploding pot."

Mlle. Naldi had been engaged at the Théâtre Italien together with her father, and had then scored some real successes, especially in *Tancredi*, and *Romeo e Giulietta*, in which she played with Mme. Pasta. She was a few years older than Garcia's daughter, felt an interest in her, and liked her. When her friend returned to Paris from America as a married woman, she rediscovered Mlle. Naldi, who had also married Count de Sparre and quitted the stage. On her arrival, we saw that she went and stayed with her husband's sisters. But, for various reasons, she became dissatisfied,

and decided, soon after, to leave a home which irked her; and it was Countess de Sparre who afforded her shelter and refuge. Countess Merlin, who only speaks of one sister of M. Malibran, tells this story of the young woman's flight from a house which was being turned into a prison for her:—

"Maria soon became discontented in M. Malibran's family. She complained of the hostile guardianship over herself and her money, but her need of some support, her fear of slander on account of her extreme youth and the absolute independence into which she was soon to be launched forth, gave her strength enough to prolong her stay with her sister-in-law for a few more weeks. But, one day, possessed by a sudden impulse, and unknown to her hostess, she hailed a hackney coach, put all of her belongings on to it, went and sat beside them, and drove off to Mme. Naldi.

"She might have taken advantage of the freedom which her position assured her, and remained alone; but, surrounded as she was with admirers, and being so young, her girlish purity of will made her realize how she required some friend; and, of her own accord, she submitted to be under the thumb of an old family

friend, a stern and prim woman. It was really touching to watch her yielding to the advice and petty self-sacrifices which her friend exacted, submitting to her resignedly that will which was elsewhere so domineering; and when she apprehended that some freak or whimsicality might have hurt her friend's feelings, she would overwhelm her with caresses and beg her pardon with all of a child's impulsiveness. She showed her all her letters, those which she received, and those which she wrote. Mme. Naldi it was who had the disposal of her earnings, and invested them, and only allowed her pocket-money.

"Shortly before her death, just when her fortunes were so brilliant, Marie told a friend, whilst showing him an old shawl she was wearing: 'I prefer using this old shawl to any other; it's the first cashmere shawl I ever wore, and it gives me some pleasure to recall how I had to coax Mme. Naldi to let me buy it.'"

After a three months' rest, Mme. Malibran reappeared at the Théâtre Italien on October 2, in *Otello*, and enjoyed all her old success. "The rôle of Desdemona, which so well suited this great singer's emotional portraiture," said Fétis, "was the occasion of a new triumph for

her. Never had she attained such a nobility of style, nor ever stirred the audience so deeply. They say the emotion she herself felt was so poignant that she had a nervous fit after the performance." After *Otello* she played in the *Barber of Seville*, in which her brother came and joined her as Figaro (but without distinction), and then *Cenerentola*, and then *La Gazza Ladra*. She also took part in several concerts given at this theatre: one of them, where she sang an air of Mercadante's, won her this fresh encomium from Fétis, who was naturally cold and unenthusiastic: "The *recitatif* of this air suits the manner of Mme. Malibran's fine expression remarkably well. Almost all through the vocal part comes out clearly, and this demands from the singer a great certainty of intonation, and plenty of presence of mind, a necessary quality which Mme. Malibran possesses to the full. A superbly fine voice, with a long range, and very even and pure, perfect intonation, faithful expression, lofty style, and great inventiveness in the *fioriture*, such are the blandishments she scattered throughout this air to secure her this triumph. The young vocalist's progress is stupendous. Only two years' more work and artistic study, and Mme. Malibran will have

reached the highest point of mastery possible in the art of song and dramatic expression.

But yet a new triumph awaited her. On December 9, 1828, the Théâtre Italien gave its audience a spectacle to which they were unaccustomed, the first production of an unpublished opera, expressly written for that theatre by a young French composer. The principal actor in it was to be Mme. Malibran, who, as always, only too glad to be able to aid anybody, had not hesitated to lend a helping hand to a young writer and assist him with all the power and authority of her talent in such a perilous venture. The work was called *Clari;* the author was Halévy, who was starting his career, had just returned from Rome, and had only, as yet, produced a one-act piece at the Opéra Comique, called the *Artisan*, and in conjunction with his friend Rifaut, a little typical opera, *Le Roi et le Batelier*.[1]

[1] The touching subject of Clari was derived from a short story, which had had great vogue, and had already been produced at the Opera in the guise of a ballet (*Clari ou la Promesse de Mariage*) on June 19, 1820. The *scenario* had been got up by Milon, the music was by Rudolphe Kreutzer, and the principal rôle was admirably taken by Mlle. Bigottini. The striking success of this ballet was shown by its being performed about a hundred times. A Florentine poet and political refugee, Pietro Giannone, had written the libretto of the Italian opera, and the performers were Mme. Malibran, MM. Donzelli, Zucchelli, Graziani, and Profeti,

Clari was a great success, thanks to Halévy's music, which I need not appreciate in this book, and also to Mme. Malibran. The *Revue Musicale* thus rendered both of them their due: "The good reception is all the more flattering, as the audience was almost entirely composed of biassed folk, who were not kindly disposed: a Frenchman, the author of an Italian opera, seemed an eccentric, perhaps to be compassionated. This sheepishness of the man in the street had to be overcome; luckily for him, M. Halévy had Mme. Malibran to interpret him, who herself, after a period of neglect, to-day enjoys public favour in full. No other actress could have ensured success, despite the interesting story and the merit of the music. For she, a great actress, as well as a fine singer, was perfect from the beginning to the end of her part; and, in the third act, in especial, was above all commendation. There are always things that astonish the public in the way

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Mlles. Maroni and Rossi. Some years later, the same theme was treated anew by Dennery and Gustave Lemoine, and transferred as a popular play to the Théâtre de la Gaîté, where it drew all Paris to hear it. The name of *La Grâce de Dieu*, under which it then was produced, remains fresh in everybody's memory. And *La Grâce de Dieu* again gave birth in its turn to another Italian opera, by Donizetti, *Linda di Chamounix*.

she takes her part on a first night; and they do not know what to think; but, gradually and unconsciously, they come to understand and admire her. I shall not quote any one passage rather than any other in her part: she sang them one and all marvellously, as she alone can. It was only in the variations in the *finale* that she might have seemed to slacken, if the emotions she had made every one feel so inwardly with herself were not sufficient excuse. None can sing after a scene of such rapture. The audience recalled the actress who had given them such keen pleasure and applauded her frantically." Another writer says of Mme. Malibran, when playing this work: "She won a frenzied triumph in *Clari*, and acted her part with all her magic expression."[1]

[1] *Biographie universelle et portative des contemporains.*— Both for composer and actress this success lasted on; in the *Moniteur universel* of January 31, 1830, we read: "On Saturday, 23rd, another performance of *Clari* is to be given at the *Théâtre Italien*, an opera by M. Halévy, a young French composer who has already given evidence of great talent. This piece has been demanded by lovers of opera, who are anxious to hear Mme. Malibran in it again, for it is she who has so successfully created the title-rôle. The numerous admirers of this great singer will only see her two or three times playing this part. Donzelli's departure, which is fixed for the 31st of this month to take the holiday to which he is entitled by the terms of his engagement, will oblige her to give over the performance of this piece."

The season ended for Mme. Malibran as brilliantly as it began. It might be said that, were it possible, the public's enthusiasm for her grew more and more; but it had already gained such huge proportions that no increase was conceivable. On April 2, 1829, after giving her last performance, which was her benefit, the receipts on which amounted to over £520, she left for London. To that city a very favourable engagement summoned her; and she had not been there since her first timid appearance on the stage, but the rumour of her triumphs in Paris aroused expectations coupled with eager curiosity. Immediately, at the King's Theatre (the director of which, at this time, was Laporte, the son of the famous Vaudeville Harlequin), she entered on another series of triumphs, perhaps even greater than those of the Théâtre Italien; and the English public, after giving her a hearty welcome on April 22, when she commenced the season with *Otello*, acclaimed her with almost mad vehemence in *Semiramide*, *Romeo e Giulietta* and *La Gazza Ladra*.

In London, Mme. Malibran once more was to act along with Mlle. Sontag, a charming singer, to whom she had done some little wrong during her sojourn in Paris. Mlle. Sontag's manner, gracious, refined, and some-

what quiet, had been in great esteem with the frequenters of the Théâtre Italien, but had been put a little in the shade beside the talents of Mme. Malibran, who was so full of vigour, passion, grandeur, and unforeseen effects, and had detracted somewhat from the popularity of the German singer. Hence there arose a rivalry between the two artists, which produced scathing comments in the papers of that time and lively polemics between contributors who took up sides for one or the other. Amongst the most zealous partisans of Mme. Malibran in this little war of wits, two of the most noteworthy were Vitet and Louis Viardot; the latter was afterwards destined to marry Mme. Malibran's younger sister Pauline.[1]

Fétis, who was in close touch with these proceedings, has dealt with the rivalry of the two singers in his notice on Mlle. Sontag: "In April, 1828, this delightful singer went to London, where her talents gained for her general enthusiasm, and her personal attractiveness and the restraint of her manners got her into the best society. The performance she gave for her benefit at the end of the season raised the huge sum of £2,000. On her

[1] For other records of Mme. Pauline Viardot *vide* "My Life" (Richard Wagner).

return to Paris a rivalry sprang up between her and Mme. Malibran, and, owing to the latter's impulsive character, assumed an aspect of mutual irritation or even hatred.[1] As always happens, the partisans of the two singers did their share in embittering the dispute day by day. There were even some unpleasant incidents when both were engaged at the Italian Theatre in London[2] for the season of 1829. The writer of this notice, who happened to be in London at the same time, was at some little pains to induce them to be reconciled. One unforeseen accident helped him in his efforts: both had promised to sing at Lord Saltoun's house for the benefit of an orchestral musician, named Ella (who afterwards became the founder of the *Musical Union* and editor of the *Miscellaneous Records* of that Society). Félis, the writer of this biography, who had promised to accom-

[1] Here, on all accounts, Félis is exaggerating. Great as was her superiority, Mme. Malibran was by no means devoid of some little pettishness or even jealousy at another singer's success. But she was too generous and noble in spirit even to let such a feeling degenerate into hatred.

[2] This theatre was in the Haymarket, nearly opposite to the Haymarket Theatre: it bore the names of the Queen's Theatre, the King's Theatre, Her Majesty's Theatre; the building in 1891 was the third on the site. The first theatre was built by Sir John Vanbrugh, and was opened on April 9, 1705; the second in 1790. The house was burned down in 1790 and 1867.

pany Mlle. Sontag and Mme. Malibran on the piano, suggested they should sing together the fine duet of Semiramis and Arsace, and managed to make them consent. It was the first time that those two voices had rung together; and the effect of this passage was indescribable, for both of the two great singers, each striving to out-sing the other, severally attained a pitch of perfection higher than any they had reached before. In view of the success of this conciliation, the manager of the Théâtre Italien in Paris proposed to make both of them act in *Semiramide* and *Tancredi*, as such a combination would render possible an ideal model, such as will perhaps never be heard again.[1]

[1] I received from Legouvé the following letter, dealing with Mme. Malibran and Mlle. Sontag, arising out of an article that appeared in the journal, where this study was first published :—

"Dear Sir,—

"Might I add to your interesting article on Mme. Malibran and Mlle. Sontag a fact I have witnessed?

"It was at an evening party at M. Bouilly's, the author of *L'Abbé de l'Epée* and *Contes à ma fille*. Mme. Malibran had surpassed herself. After the concert was over, one clumsy admirer came up to her and thought he could pay her no better compliment than to run down Mlle. Sontag and say she had been cold.

"'Cold,' Mme. Malibran rejoined sharply, 'she only needed one thing more, suffering. Let her have a little trouble, and you will see if she is cold!'

The 1829 season at London was very brilliant, thanks to Mlle. Sontag and Mme. Malibran being there together; but in justice it must be admitted that the latter roused more enthusiasm, making whole audiences burst into storms of wild applause. After the closure of the theatre, she was engaged to sing at various provincial festivals, amongst others at Bath and Birmingham. The latter place is the scene of a story the truth of which I cannot guarantee; but, taking her fearless character, and Mme. Malibran's essentially unusual disposition, it seems to me to have all the semblance of probability. At any rate, it is interesting enough to relate here.

At the same time as Mme. Malibran, a young English vocalist, Miss Paton (afterwards Mrs.

"Some months later an unpleasant incident happened, which caused a great stir then in Paris. Mlle. Sontag's honour as a woman had been unjustly attacked, and she was deeply wounded by the insulting and unjust reception of her by the public; and left the stage, not wishing to reappear before her innocence had been acknowledged. She returned to take up one of the most pathetic parts in her repertory, that of Donna Anna in *Don Juan*. She was sublime. 'Well,' said Mme. Malibran, 'Wasn't I right?' This profoundly touching phrase of hers deserves, I think, to be preserved to posterity.

"Believe me,

"Yours faithfully,

"E. Legouvé."

Wood) was engaged to sing at Birmingham; she was already famous and distinguished. As an Englishwoman, she had been assigned the larger part of the programme, despite Mme. Malibran's world-wide reputation; and on the first programme she had six songs, leaving only two to be sung by Mme. Malibran. Such a division could not be passed over without some protest on Mme. Malibran's part: as soon as she was acquainted with the facts, she hurried up to the director of the festival to complain.

"Is this the programme you have arranged?" she asked.

"Yes, madam, it is."

"You will excuse my being rather surprised to see that I have only two songs, and Miss Paton six long ones. I don't like this unfair division; I hope you will set this unfairness right."

"I am sorry it is impossible now; the programme has been circulated amongst the subscribers, and not a word in it can be altered."

Mme. Malibran insisted, declared she didn't wish to cut down Miss Paton's portion, but only to be treated on an equality with her, and to have the same number of passages each. It was no good, and, with the utmost courtesy, she was assured that the programme was immutable.

"So you've made up your mind?" she asked; "you won't change it?"

"Impossible," she was told once again.

"Very well, I will right my case for myself."

On that evening the hall was crowded, and the concert began; Phillips sang first, then Miss Paton, then the famous tenor Braham. At last Mme. Malibran's turn came on, and her appearance was greeted with a murmur of mingled satisfaction and expectation. The orchestra plunged into the *ritornella* of the *cavatina* in the "Barber of Seville," *une voce poco fa;* and the effect that the singer produced may be imagined; she was more than ever anxious to re-assert the greatness of her talent. Hardly was the selection over than echoing salvoes of cheers burst out all over the audience; and when Mori, the violinist, one of the directors of the concert, stepped on to the stage to offer his arm to Mme. Malibran, she was loudly encored. She bowed her acknowledgments, signed to the orchestra to cease playing, sat down at the piano, and sang the *cavatina* over again, accompanying herself. The cheering was twice as clamorous at the end of the piece as before, and, just when Mori was getting ready to conduct her off again, Mme. Malibran

nodded to him, with a smile on her lips, remained sitting at the piano, and immediately sang one of the Spanish songs she had learned from her father, and rendered with incomparable fire and vivacity. This last song acted as the spark, and then pit, boxes, gallery, the whole house burst into a storm of vehement and riotous enthusiasm. Mori once more showed his face, but was hissed and booed off; and Mme. Malibran, who had risen to bow, sat down again at the piano, and, accompanying herself all the time, sang, one after the other, a German folk-song, a French air, and wound up with a song in English, which, naturally enough, was greeted with thunderous cheers and ceaseless acclamation. The whole house were on their feet, shouting, yelling, the men clapping, the women waving their handkerchiefs, all possessed by a sort of madness. At last, Mme. Malibran, very much moved, as might be believed, by such a demonstration, was able to retire on Mr. Mori's arm; and, as soon as she had left the public view, received the tribute and congratulations of all the artists present, as also of the director of the festival, who, rather abashed at first at his own brusqueness, eagerly came forward to compliment her on her achievement. She turned to him with her sweetest

smile, and said quite simply: "I told you I would right my own case."

Mme. Malibran received, it is said, seventy guineas for each of these festivals. At this point details might be given of the engagements into which Mme. Malibran entered at the Italian theatres in Paris and London: much has been said on this subject, but too often inaccurately. Countess Merlin says that when she was re-engaged at the Italian Theatre in Paris by Laurent, the director for the winter of 1829, it was "under the same conditions as the preceding year, *i.e.* £32 per performance *plus* a benefit." But she is wrong; for the content of this receipt proves it, showing she then received £40 a night—

THÉÂTRE ROYAL ITALIEN ET ANGLAIS.[1]

Received from M. E. Laurent the sum of 1,000 francs, the fee for my second performance in the present week.

M.-F. MALIBRAN.

14*th November* 1829.

And, as to the next season, another receipt, dated January 13, 1831, makes it clear that she

[1] A company of English actors was then occupying the Salle Favart, together with the Italian singers; and the official title of the theatre had been changed.

received £43 a performance, whilst in a third receipt, dated December 31 following, a sum of £50 is specified.

Regarding her receipts in London, Countess Merlin is no better informed when she says that Mme. Malibran was engaged for seventy-five guineas a performance. This time she went beyond the mark; just now she fell short. Sir George Grove, who is evidently well informed on this point, states in the *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, in his article on Marie Malibran: "When engaged again at the Italian Opera in Paris in January 1830, she was paid 1,075 francs for each representation. This was less than she had received from Laporte in London, for he had given francs 13,333·33 a month, an odd sum, unless it meant 40,000 francs for three months:[1] and she stipulated only to appear twice a week, making each of those appearances cost francs 1,666·66, or about £66. Though she certainly continued to draw no higher salary at the Paris Opera in 1830 and 1831, and her charge for singing at private concerts in London, 1829, was only twenty-five guineas, yet Alfred Bunn[2] engaged her soon

[1] Obviously.

[2] A dramatic writer, also the manager of the Drury Lane Theatre.

after for nineteen nights at £125 per night, *payable in advance*."

Evidently, from this time onwards, Mme. Malibran's talents were quoted at very high prices, a fact which indicates how eager the public were to hear her, and how they admired her. I shall have occasion to return to this point.

CHAPTER IV

Acts in Brussels and sensational success—Meets Charles de Bériot—Reappears at Théâtre Italien, and excites fresh enthusiasm—Her moral qualities—Generosity—Two interesting letters.

As soon as ever Mme. Malibran had terminated her English engagements, she was summoned to go to Belgium, where the desire to see her was keen. She arrived at Brussels in the early days of August, and on the 11th of that month she took part in a large concert given at the Théâtre de la Monnaie, where she sang an air out of *Cenerentola*, the *Cavaliere* in the *Barber of Seville*, a *tyrolienne*, and, together with Mlle. Dorus, the duet in *Semiramide*. She appeared for a second time in the Salle du Grand Concert on the 15th, and on the 17th she played in French the part of Rosina in the *Barber of Seville*. Needless to say she carried everything before her.[1] A few days afterwards

[1] This is the programme of the performance at the Grand Concert: 1. Overture by Rossini; 2. Air, by Rossini, *Di tanti palpiti* (Mme. Malibran); 3. Duet on a theme in *Moses*, by Rossini, for harp and violin, composed by Charles de Bériot, and played by Mlle. d'Espouvin and the composer;

she was invited to the Château de Chimay, which was a centre of good music, and there she once again came across the famous violinist Charles de Bériot, whom she had met several times previously ; he was soon to count for very much in her life. Countess Merlin thus tells the story of the characteristic episode, which marked this new chance which brought the two great musicians together :—

" M. de Bériot was born in Belgium. He was a distinguished artist, and had passed the past winter in Paris. Maria had met him several times at the assemblies where they played together. She scarcely knew him, but felt some interest in him, partly on account of his talent, which she admired with the impulsiveness congenital to her quick imagination, and partly as she knew he was unhappy in his love-affairs. . . . Misfortune is a note that strikes home into the heart of a passionate and sensi-

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4. Tyrolese song for two voices (Mme. Malibran and . . . ?); 5. Variations for piano and violin, composed and played by Osborne and de Bériot; 6. A duet by Rossini (Mme. Malibran and Mlle. . . . ?) ; 7. A symphony of Beethoven ; 8. A fantasia for the pianoforte by Pixio, on the *Last Thought of Weber*, played by Osborne ; 9. An air by Rossini (Mme. Malibran) ; 10. Air, with variations, for the violin, written and played by Charles de Bériot ; 11. French and Spanish romances (Mme. Malibran).

tive woman, and Maria's pity for de Bériot was, no doubt, unconscious love. Towards the beginning of summer each went his own way, and Maria met him again at Brussels.

"One evening they were at the Château de Chimay, and Bériot had just played through a concerto of his own composition. Whilst the applause was still going on, Maria walked up to him, pale-faced and with tears in her eyes : she took his hands into her own, which were trembling, and said, with a wealth of expression, 'I am so glad you have done so well.' 'Thank you, so much,' said de Bériot, whilst paying attention to others who were also congratulating him, 'I am very much flattered to have earned your good opinion.' 'No, no, that isn't it at all, not at all. Can't you see that I love you?'

"De Bériot felt both embarrassed and enraptured by a feeling so sincere and so simply put, and wondered whether he were dreaming, or that Maria, carried away by an impulse, had merely spoken without thinking.

"But from that day between those two musicians there was a union of hearts."

On October 28 Mme. Malibran was back at Paris, where she left Mme. de Sparre, and at last settled down in an establishment of her

own, a private residence she had rented, No. 26, rue de Provence. On November 4 she reappeared at the Théâtre Italien in *La Gazza Ladra*. One critic appreciated her as follows: "In the *Gazza Ladra* her fine voice sometimes lacked the *brio*, the silvery ring which the high melodies in the piece require: Mmes. Mombelli and Fodor used to master this thoroughly; but in the mouth of the new singer, Ninetta's rôle became transformed; she put into her part all the dramatic power and resistless gracefulness which give so much pleasure to music-lovers. It is a shame to miss hearing her sing the famous *cavatina* brilliantly and expressively, with touches of fine taste which make her seem to be conducting rather than following the orchestra. In the first duet she uses so much force, such warmth of execution, as to stir her hearers to transports of enthusiasm no less keen the eleventh time than the first. *Io tremo, parente*—these words uttered with a mien of reality, and accompanied with a livelier and quicker movement, always make the audience shudder.[1] In the course of this season, Mme. Malibran sang *Tancredi* and Zingarelli's *Romeo e Giulietta* with Mlle. Sontag as her second in the parts of Amenaida and Juliet; and it was

[1] *Biographie universelle et portative des contemporains.*

at this time that the three parts in Mozart's *Don Juan* were played by Mme. Malibran, Mlle. Sontag and Mlle. Heinefetter.

Garcia had now returned from Mexico, and was back again at the Théâtre Italien playing the *Barber of Seville.* He had aged prematurely, and his fine voice showed signs of wearing out; even his great talents had declined. But the public respected the "old lion" for his great renown, and the management of the theatre (who knew of the disasters that had befallen him when he left America) gave him a benefit performance, in which he was to play *Otello* together with his daughter. Legouvé tells this pleasant story in connection with this production :—

"Garcia's violence had already made family life stormy. Father and daughter were mortally estranged and divided long before Garcia arrived at Paris, an old and soured man. A performance was organized at the Théâtre Italien. The announcement ran: 'Othello, M. Garcia; Desdemona, Mme. Malibran.' I was present that night. Never was there a public so eager. Garcia appeared, then Mme. Malibran, then Lablache, who was taking the father's part. Was it his daughter's presence?

I do not know, but the 'old lion' recovered all the sublime soarings of his powerful voice. She, stung into action and startled by this new meeting, so reminiscent of painful memories, both in the first act, in the delightful duet with the nurse, and in the *finale*, sang in accents of such despairing melancholy, which were like an echo of the willow-song in Othello; and the curtain fell on the first act to a pandemonium of cheers. The curtain fell, but I am telling my story too fast. In the *finale* Othello stands on the right of the spectator, almost in the wings, and Desdemona in the same position on the left. Well, whilst the curtain was falling, and was only a very few inches off the boards, the feet of Desdemona could be seen turning to run very fast towards the feet of Othello. There were loud demands for a recall, the curtain rose once again, and they appeared together, only they were both equally black. She had thrown herself into her father's arms, and her face was covered with patches of the colour of Othello's countenance, and his face had become whiter in contact with hers. It was farcical, but not a soul dreamed of laughing. The public, though only half in the secret, saw the sight was touching, and did not perceive its grotesqueness, and set to work to applaud the father and

daughter, whom their craft, their gifts and their success had reconciled, whom Rossini had linked together anew."[1]

In the course of this season a new opera called *Fausto*, composed by Mlle. Louise Bertin, the daughter of the editor of the *Journal des Débats*, was put on the boards of the Théâtre Italien, and Mme. Malibran was assigned one of the principal rôles. According to the *Moniteur*, an official paper, and therefore reliable, "The Théâtre Italien will on Monday 1st March give, for M. Inchindi's benefit, a first performance of *Fausto*, a serio-comic opera in four acts, the principal parts to be taken by Mmes. Pisaconi, Malibran, Mlle. Bordogui, Graziani, and M. Inchindi."[2] Three weeks later we read: "Only a few days more to wait, and a young student of our great composers will enable us to listen to her score of Fausto, on the stage, so often embellished with the magnificent chords of Rossini, Weber (!!!) Paër, etc."[3] But what happened exactly; what obstacles prevented the study and rehearsals of *Fausto?* I cannot find out. Anyhow, the work was not played on that date,

[1] *Maria Malibran*, by Ernest Legouvé. Paris, Hetzel.
[2] *Moniteur universel*, February 16, 1830.
[3] *Moniteur universel*, March 7, 1830.

but one whole year later, on March 7, 1831. And then Mme. Malibran took no share in the interpretation of it.

Mme. Malibran was to leave Paris on April 9 to go to London again, passing through Belgium and Holland, where she had promised to sing. Her last performance was fixed for April 3, and was her benefit. This is the programme, as stated in the *Figaro* of that day :—

THÉÂTRE ITALIEN

BENEFIT OF MME. MALIBRAN-GARCIA

A Scene out of Pygmalion[1]

A serio-comic opera in two acts, Music by Rossini ; Argirio, Bordogni; Orbassano, Levasseur ; Buggeo, Trévaux ; Tancredi, Mme. Garcia ; Aménaïde, Mme. Damoreau ; Isaura, Mme. Prossi.

The play went off with immense success, and Mme. Malibran was fêted, as may be imagined. According to the *Moniteur*, "The performance at Mme. Malibran's benefit was one of the most brilliant. After delighting the audience in *Tancredi* and *Pimmalione* as a great singer and actress, she could not escape the loud

[1] It was the *Pimmalione* of Asioli.

applause of the many admirers of her talents. She was recalled, with Mme. Damoreau-Cinti on her arm; but the latter soon left the stage, to let a rival and friend enjoy the perfume of the flowers with which the stage was liberally loaded. Crowns and bouquets kept falling from all sides. . . ."

Mme. Malibran, who was a good friend, a lofty and compassionate character, always ready to help her neighbour, to put her talents and fame at the disposal of any claimant, had, during the rough winter of 1829–1830, numerous opportunities of proving that her kindliness and unselfishness were as great as her incomparable genius. On January 3, 1830, she acted at the Opera in a benefit of Mme. Damoreau; and there sung, together with Mme. Damoreau and Mlle. Sontag, the first act of Cimarosa's "Secret Marriage": this beautiful trio for female voices was admirably sung by these three artists and revolutionized musical Paris, and was its one staple of conversation for several weeks.[1] A few days later, on the

[1] "Never before had such a combination of singers so gifted come together amongst us; hearing them was to hear perfection itself. Mme. Damoreau did the honours of her house by offering the part of Carolina to Mlle. Sontag; she kept that of Elisetta, the second part; Mme.

18th, she took part in Mlle. Sontag's farewell performance; the latter was marrying and leaving the stage, and playing for the last time with Mme. Malibran in *Tancredi*. On the 24th she was back again at the Opera; playing in a special performance on behalf of the poor, consisting of the second act of *Tancredi*, and the first of *Don Juan*.[1] On March 24, at the benefit for the orchestra at the Théâtre Italien, she played one act of *Otello*, one act of the *Nozze di Figaro*, and one act of *Romeo e Giulietta*, thus appearing in succession in such utterly diverse parts as Desdemona, Suzanna and Romeo.

As I said, she was always willing to give her talents away to aid any one whom she might serve. But the kindness of this sweet woman did not stop at this point, for her heart might be said to bleed for any mishap, and to account no expense in healing it. Her correspondence on this subject is instructive and worth our

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Malibran was content to appear in the guise of Fidalma, the old aunt. Applause, which became furious and clamorous, burst out from all parts of the house when these marvellous voices tackled the *tutti* of the trio "*Lo faccio in inchino*" (Castil-Blaze, *L'Académie impériale de musique*, vol. ii. p. 213).

[1] The aged King Charles X was present on this occasion; and the receipts amounted to £1662 7*s*.; and, together with donations, £2081 3*s*.

attention. I have before me two of her letters, of this time, sent to a friend, whose name I am sorry not to know: to read them will tell the story better than any laudation :—

"29*th November*, 1829.

"Will you come Tuesday at 5 o'clock? I will give you the £200 I have offered you. But secretly, and unknown even to my mother; for I haven't told her. It makes me rather angry you should know the use to which I intend putting it. I so love hiding things even from my most intimate friends. I fear your tongue may wag just a little bit, and, then, good-bye to all of the pleasure! I hope the man, whose name I don't want to know, will have no suspicion that I have any share in his goings-on. You are to have *all the credit* of it. Only I must be assured that this so-called porter is clear of a situation which would have compromised his daughter's establishment; this is *all* my heart desires. The blessings showered on you by this family are all *your* due; for, but for your pitying them, I should never have come to know of their wretched condition.

"Thus, I see no reason you should *know*, as you put it, 'my amiable you' every instant of the day. Take care!

"My little Bul gives me great pleasure. I believe he has his wits about him, and is good-natured. I think I noticed he liked me at once, and this out of a feeling of gratitude. If you have told him I could contribute to put him in the school, I shall find out in his tears of gratitude; if you have not, I shall see a kindly trait in the fact.

"Excuse this vile scrawl: but my pen is more like a brush. No more.

"I am,

"Yours ever,

"M.-F. MALIBRAN."

This letter shows she was charitable to a rare extent—at any time £200 is a largish sum of money—but also in the noblest and loftiest sense of the word, as she would not let the persons she helped so generously know of her, and she would not even know of them. This is a sign of delicacy of spirit, of a sense of shame in charity of which few are capable.

Another letter, addressed to the same person, follows, quite as striking as the first:—

"16*th January*, 1830.

"Here I am at it again, begging you *on my bended knees* to listen to what this dear little

woman I am sending you has to say, and convinced you will do *all you can* to find a place, even as a hotel manager, for her husband—M. G. . . . *They haven't a farthing. Do find something.* Do, please! If you only knew how heavy my heart is about it! I should like to do something to free them from their present utter misery. But don't appear to know too much of their wretchedness.

"With their positions at the theatre, they have managed somehow, having to pay off debts, some of which are still overdue: what they have left goes to pay former debts. They have a child . . . When they have sold out their little furniture, they will be *altogether* [*sic*] *without anything.* You are kind, you will do all you can to drag them from the abyss, into which one more step will hurl them, if you don't immediately come to the rescue.

"Excuse me, do please, for my bothering you in this way, but I am very much concerned with this *friend of my childhood,* both on account of her misfortune, and for auld lang syne, and cannot recommend her and her husband sufficiently,

"Yours very truly,

"M.-F. MALIBRAN."

CHAPTER V

Returns to London—Opinion of Mme. Méric-Lalande—Makes a *furore*—Her anxieties—Her wish to annul her marriage—Theatre, concerts and parties—Enormous activity—Curious anecdotes—Proud of being born in France.

After the Paris season, as in the year before, we shall discover Mme. Malibran in London again after April. She was engaged at the King's Theatre, when this time she was to sing, not with Mlle. Sontag (who had become Countess Rossi, and an ambassador's wife), but with a French singer, Mlle. Méric-Lalande, who had just come back from Italy, where her success had been striking, and had created the parts in three of Bellini's operas, *Il Pirata*, *La Straniera* and *Zaira*. In the letter which follows, Mme. Malibran shows that she had not been unperturbed with respect to her rival; it was natural enough, for Mme. Lalande reached England the possessor of a great reputation; and, as Mme. Malibran was only to start her own season after Mme. Lalande had already appeared, she was very glad of the opportunity of hearing and judging her beforehand. This letter, in which she tells a Parisian friend her

impression of Mme. Lalande, was spiteful, or even unjust, and betrays no sign of great charity. What of that? She was, after all, a woman, an artist, and jealous of her name. She so evidently had her foibles, even her angles, just like anybody else. Why hide them? She was fair and good enough to be forgiven mercifully. The letter I am quoting is in vivid contrast with the one I cited just now, and shows she had wit, playfulness of disposition, lively temper, and was bright, full of charm, and fanciful :—

"My dear, my best of friends,—

"I didn't want to write until I had something interesting to say ; but I will break the ice now and start without any aim or object, except, perhaps, to let you make out my scribble, at which, no doubt, you will jump with joy and delight, and will be in the seventh heaven for quite two or three days. . . . I say this, as I judge others after my own measure. I can see you from here thumping your forehead and thigh with your right hand and exclaiming, 'Good Lord, she's at it again!—These women! Kind dear creatures they are, after all!' And I reply: 'Quite true, hundreds of times over, quite true!'

"Let's see if I can cheer you up with a real piece of news. Let's talk about Mme. Lalande's appearance.

"Here I am at the theatre with Lady Flynt, her husband, and their daughter. Here I am, my opera-glasses screwed to my eyes, moveless as a statue, wait for the Pirate, personated by Donzelli,[1] to appear after the overture.

"The overture, h'm. So so. Nothing very startling. Up goes the curtain. Scenery quite good. The overture is applauded. A good scene-painter is the most important artist to make an overture go.

"On comes the Pirate: bellowing and shouting a tune, and gaining unearned applause, which he acknowledges by making thirty-six bows and curtsies, until he is lost to view in the wings. The tune isn't bad, and has its points of originality.

"A new scene.

"'*Venga la bella Italiana*,'[2] says *my little self* to me, who was all agog.

"'At last, she comes on!' I say to myself, and push up to the fringe of the box to get a better

[1] I.e. *Il Pirata* in Bellini's opera.

[2] This is chaff, as Mme. Lalande was neither beautiful nor an Italian.

view. Imagine a woman, fair, flimsy, and forty,[1] a face like a working-woman's, scarcely any good expression, no figure, having, like me, the most hideous foot in the world, with an ugly head-attire, and a costume *idem*.

"She starts the *récitatif*. Ugh! Her voice quavers so much that I cannot tell whether it is sharp or sweet, or anything else. I am all expectancy for the *cavatina*, so as to judge. She commences it. She shrills out a note like

"Now I'm all pity for this poor woman, who has no nerve. She gets to the end of the air, which is very pretty, but sung by her with this odious wavy accompaniment. . . . She is cheered and applauded over and over again. She ducks forward hundreds of times; this is the London custom, obtaining nowhere else: forewarned means forearmed for her: and she earns prolonged bravoes.

"Next comes the fine duet you know. She sings it coldly and with this eternal *tremolo*. Well—no reason to bore you any longer—she finishes the opera, as she began it. She has a fine tune at the end, where she goes mad. Her *consorte* and her lover have just been killed.

[1] This is inaccurate. Mme. Lalande was born in 1798, and, in 1829, was very far off her forties.

She comes on the stage with her little yawning baby, because he prefers to go bye-bye than to listen to a melody *lacrimoso*, which ought to be sung and played, too, quite differently, so as to produce a dazing effect. Naturally, she did not succeed in getting anything whatsoever out of it. Still, she was recalled. She came back and received the most anonymous—I mean unanimous — cheers ever given to anybody, because it was generally said she was no good. But I didn't want to prejudge like every one else does: I waited to see.

"Well, '*vien' il meglio*,' as Suzanna says. I have discovered that this trick of singing and making a ~~~~~~~~~~ sound is an immutable eternal law of the Medes and Persians. You understand now how well my voice and hers will go together, two notes to me, and two notes to her: just like goats bleating one after the other. Her middle notes are like a stretched iron wire, which would evoke the little rusty note, very sweet indeed.

"The piece isn't bad, I must admit; but there are weak points in it. There is a magnificent trio between the two rivals and the wife; she so faithfully adores the Pirate, that the rival—the husband—finds himself lying quite nicely at his wife's feet, and she will not follow

him, despite the humble pie he is eating. I am the last person in the world to be able to explain this scene intelligibly, which is very like that of Othello, Iago, and Desdemona; but, I know whom I'm dealing with, and that I need not sweep aside the dark veils that generally envelop my descriptions.

"How true the adage is: that evil communications corrupt good manners! I see I can't write one line without involving myself in these horrible parentheses. You will be able to judge, therefore, what a pleasure it is when you want to find out something of real consequence to yourself, never to get anywhere at all, to meander endlessly, to spell out your story in curves and zigzags. . . . Well, you know what I mean. I only give you the hint as an aside, because I don't want any frippery in the letters I expect to receive from you every day, which will inform me of the rise and fall of your health, and the decline thereof.

"M.-F. Malibran."

Mme. Méric-Lalande's success was not very great, and, as she made no money, Mme. Malibran's first appearance was hastened on. We learn of this from her letters; this one also is addressed to the same friend:—

"*29th April*, 1830.

"I am making my first appearance, because Laporte is a frost. Mme. Lalande's poor success has taken all his colour out of him: and he is awaiting me as a Messiah, to haul him out of his slough in which he is immersed to his neck. You know that chimney-sweeps always start their programme on the first of the merrie month of May, by dancing through the streets dressed like merry-andrews, rouged. I am very glad not to have to appear that day, as I dread comparisons. There are enough to face, without adding that one.

"You will know that I am so utterly nervous with fright that I am ill with it. Let's talk of something else. I am going to lunch. This evening, after the opera, you shall know what I was like.

"M.-F. MALIBRAN."

Next day she wrote as follows:—

"One more ordeal borne and passed! Last night I made my first appearance in *Cenerentola*. My friend, know that I have made what they call a *furore* in England, as, in Paris, I should have taken my success as a sign of coming senility. Yet the beginning was good. I was recalled after the piece, and was applauded by

the whole house, pit and boxes. They say my voice is stronger than last year. They say very little stature charms them—I don't care much; I only tell you, as I tell you everything. They say I am very well, I have all my resources under command. This is true. I have shown the greatest kindliness in starting on a Thursday, which is the Italian Opera day, when the theatre is deserted, *i. e.* when only benefit performances are given. Thus, though the house was not quite full, they were astonished to see so many there; and, as I was the inducement that made them come, it makes me terribly fashionable.

"Whilst crossing the theatre, I noticed my friend *Louchard*, to whom I bowed gracefully, as I do when I do not want to bow twice. To-morrow I rehearse again, and believe I shall sing much better. This evening I am to sing an air at a concert given by the *veterinary* artists.

"Must I tell you once more, that you are everything to me? You know it better than I do. It is to you I owe the little happiness I enjoy now, and did enjoy at Paris. You are so good! Also I wear a ring, the perfect symbol of our friendship, a knot which is indissoluble, which grows tighter the more it is pulled. Is it not the image of the most perfect and firmest

affection, the most lasting and purest friendship? Yes, the more I think of it, the better I understand by this friendship what eternity is, for it seems to me I must meet you after I am dead, and shall love you still, and the same. How lovely eternity will then be! But there are things in this world of death and pain which also will last eternally.

"I had written in my despair to Viardot, who has done all he can to console me. I was so unhappy that I told Lady Flynt, my kindly friend, what my sorrow was.[1] She spoke of it to one of her friends, a splendid fellow, who told me that he, in a similar case, had been saved from his net by consulting one of his friends, an old Lord (sixty-nine years old), who seems to have the whole of the law at his finger-tips. To-day at twelve o'clock Sir George Warrender, who is *the old friend of the oldest friend*,[2] will come and talk to me about it. I take no risks

[1] All of this refers to Mme. Malibran's great preoccupation for some time past, to contrive to annul her marriage or to get a divorce. The young woman could not endure the idea of being shackled to a man, who was a greybeard beside her, and, what with the divergence of surroundings and conditions, could neither understand nor appreciate her. But, as I have said, there is no means of discovering what passed between them: and, anyhow, six years had to elapse before she could gain her end.

[2] *Le vieux ami du plus vieux*, her own phrase.

by seeking advice, and shall tell him all that is essential—and no more—to get out of him some useful counsel to relieve my oppressed mind.

"If you were near me, and I could talk to you, I should not go to strangers to seek a cure for my grief. But, my friend, please do not spring a surprise on me. When the happy day comes on which I am to see you again, give me a good long warning, and let me gulp down, beforehand, some savour of the happiness, of which I shall soon taste the source. . . . Yes, you are the purest source of it; you only can make the flower drooping earthwards raise its head, give it a new birth, and let your spirit replenish its strength and vigour. . . . To think of it . . . And the flower is one who never leaves you, who is all for you, because you are good, and can comfort the afflicted, give fatherly advice, be their brother, because you are mine, and because, because . . . I shall never get to the end of my because's, even if I had to parade them all before M. le . . .

"Now I leave you, I am going to dress to await my man, the *friend of the old friend;* and then I have to rehearse.

"Good-bye, papa, mama, brother, sister; Good-bye Everything, Everything.

"M.-F. Malibran."

Next day, another letter written in two parts, one in the morning, and one in the evening to announce her second performance and triumph.

"1*st May.*

"I have been having people in all day long to rehearse, and have not been able to write to you, my friend; my carriage is below, waiting to take me to the theatre, where it will leave me, like my slipper, if I am late: then my coachman will become a big rat, my lacquey a squirrel, my horses a fine pair of mice. I will write to you what happens to-night, which as a fashionable *soirée* in London at our theatre . . .

"I have just been playing, dear true friend; never, dear, never all the season through, has there been such a crush. People were turned back in crowds. I sang better than on Thursday. All my friends are delighted with me, and seem to like me immensely. They came and congratulated me, after the opera was over, and I could hear them saying amongst themselves: 'That is singing if you like,—a real artist—what wonderful talent!'

"It gave me a great deal of pleasure, whilst, at the same time, I am sorry it should be so, on account of the trouble it may cause them. But there we are, and . . .

"M.-F. Malibran."

In fact, during this season, Mme. Malibran carried the field as she never had done before. When her name figured on the bill, the theatre was literally crammed ; not a concert, public or private, where she was not in requisition ; she was lionized in society, invited by the Duchess of Canizzaro, the Duke of Wellington, and many other houses ; she had no respite. Castil-Blaze says on this point : "What a singer's life is in London—an operatic singer with great dramatic power—is very well known. After rehearsals, three or four concert *matinées ;* after the curtain falls, and the theatre may be left behind, evening parties, lasting until daybreak. The actor gets into his carriage to be driven from one house to another. Mme. Malibran kept up with all her engagements ; and further, her Sundays, which in England are days of absolute rest, Marietta gave up to her friends, to be spent in gay labour of all sorts. She would sing, be as merry as a child with its family and numerous friends, lavish on them the treasures of her voice and the charm of her wit." But Mme. Malibran's stupendous success was so great that it overflowed the bounds of London even. Her fame spread abroad every day so far and so widely that certain provincial cities, eager to become acquainted with her talents, and have

their share of it, pertinaciously sought after her, on days when the Italian Opera was not performing in the capital, so that she could escape for a moment. On the 26th she writes—it is always to the same friend: "Wednesday, I go to Bath after the classical concert; arrive there Thursday, 9 a.m.; 1 p.m., I sing two songs; leave Bath, arrive at Bristol 2 p.m. to sing in the evening with Donzelli in the third act of *Otello*. I earn my one hundred and twenty guineas, and am back next day in London to start the round again." This young woman, so frail in outward look, must have had an iron constitution and an indomitable strength of will to bear up against such a life and withstand such heroic efforts without enfeebling herself. Yet, as to what she accomplished in this way, we shall see many other instances when she set foot in Italy, and divided her time between that country, which was acclaiming and demanding her everywhere at once, and France, which she always loved, and England, which was always summoning her back, and Belgium, the country of Charles de Bériot, her second husband. From this time forward it is difficult to follow her in all of her travels and movements.

But, to return to England, where, during her

next stay, we can elicit some interesting facts that illustrate the great artist's character. This one, amongst others, is rather curious.

Naturally enough, a woman in the position of Mme. Malibran, young, idolized everywhere, in the full blaze of a wonderful genius, the absolute mistress of her doings, would necessarily become the focus of attraction to a whole host of courtiers and "adoring friends," of whom some, no doubt, might feel a genuine passion for her, whereas others would outrage her by imagining that with her, as an actress, one certain line of conduct could not fail of success. They say that a rich English banker one day sent her £4,000 in bank-notes, deeming such a demonstration irresistible and likely to smooth his way: he soon learned how mistaken he had been, when the receiver simply returned him his gift. But these are the facts.

One night, during a performance of *Otello* at the King's Theatre, Mme. Malibran and Donzelli were on the stage together, when an enormous bouquet was thrown at her feet; she picked it up, and out of the flowers there fluttered down to the floor a piece of paper. Donzelli stooped down to pick it up, and was about to hand it to his colleague, when the entire house began shouting to have the message read out. Mme.

Malibran, who had seen and understood the whole purport of it, nudged Donzelli, who stepped forward to the prompter's box, and read out aloud—

"Bank of England

Promises to pay the Bearer

the Sum of one thousand Pounds," etc.

Then, to the amazement and amid the laughter of the audience, Donzelli, after a whispered consultation with Mme. Malibran, asked for silence so that he could speak, and said: "Ladies and Gentlemen, we are sorry we may not read out the whole of this letter, which has only reached us by mistake, and is addressed to the poor of the metropolis." It may well be thought that these words were greeted with thunders of applause. No more graceful and witty way of getting out of an awkward situation could have been devised.

Another story, in which Lablache, a fine character, and a member of the company, took part, to his own credit, provides another instance of Mme. Malibran's tact and delicacy. At this epoch, when princes, native or foreign, tyrannized over Italy with ferocious cruelty, and caused numberless conspiracies against them, the wretched political refugees who were pro-

scribed sought shelter in all of the free States. One of them, who had been residing in London for some time, got permission to return home, but was in such straits that he had not the wherewithal to pay for the expense of the journey. It occurred to him he might apply to his fellow-countryman, Lablache, to obtain his co-operation and assistance. Lablache at once mentioned the matter to his colleagues, who were all together at the theatre for a rehearsal, and suggested a common fund to raise the means for the sufferer to rejoin his family. Donzelli gave £2, Mme. Lalande as much; and turning to Mme. Malibran, who had remained silent, Lablache said: "And, Maria, what will you give?" "The same as the rest of you," she replied. Lablache was delighted, and rushed off to convey his little store to the poor fellow, who was awaiting it anxiously. But, that night, during the performance, Mme. Malibran took Lablache aside and said: "My friend, please add this £10 from me for your charge: I did not like to seem to give more than the others, just now, for fear of offending them. Say nothing about it." Lablache, now overjoyed, went next morning to see his man, and found him gone, so eager not to lose any time that he had already left home to embark. What was he to do? Lablache, so far from

being damped, got information, dashed up to the wharf, and arrived there just as the gangway was let go. He jumped into a boat, was rowed up to the ship's side, boarded it, gave his man the sum that had just been entrusted to him, and went away as he had come.

At the conclusion of the theatrical season, Mme. Malibran left London to sing at various provincial festivals to which she had been invited. When at Norwich, news reached her of the July Revolution at Paris. She remembered at once she was French by birth, boasted of it, and sent a friend this interesting and delightful letter :—

"NORWICH, *August* 1830.

"I am so glad, so proud, so happy, so absolutely vain that I belong to the French. You wept because you were not there? Not one day passes but that I deplore the fact that I have not lost an eye or a limb in the fight in this cause of the golden age—and I am only a woman. For, is it not the real golden age to rebel for liberty and, at the same time, to cast off the semblance of usurping rights over other peoples? I tell you that, when I think of Paris, my soul feels exalted! Do you think that soldiers, armed with guns, could have stopped me from shouting out loud, 'Hurrah for liberty!' They

tell me things are not yet quite quiet in France. Write to me to affirm this, and I'll set out: I want to share my brethren's lot. Charity, they say, begins at home. Well, those others —are my home and my *own self*. *Vive la France!* . . .

"M.-F. MALIBRAN."

Some weeks later, on October 1, when on the point of returning to France, she wrote from Birmingham a letter, in which she says: "When I think that, in twenty-four days' time, I shall be in my own noble country, my heart brims over with joy. It seems to me I ought to see a change in all the faces in France. I imagine them beaming with freedom, their eyes full of that fiery and happy look inspired by the sense of the good deed done. All of this is much clearer in my brain-cap than on paper, a poor *Mercure* of my ideas. . . . They tell me it isn't all over yet. . . . if I could have lost an arm in such a cause, I should believe I had gained two by sheer dint of conviction that I had served for something in maintaining the laws of Nature. I am beginning to flame and flare, as things are. Good-bye. I've talked long enough."

Mme. Malibran had not merely charm, but was not deaf to noble and generous ideals.

CHAPTER VI

Again at Théâtre Italien—New triumphs—She and General La Fayette—Fatigue and illness—Enforced rest—Reappears at Théâtre Italien, but cannot finish season—Leaves for Brussels, and gives a concert with de Bériot.

In November, 1830, Mme. Malibran was to return to Paris, which she loved so well, where she had been born, had earned her fame, and came back to with such deep joy. And it was again in the pathetic part of Desdemona, which had won her her first triumphs, that she presented herself anew before the public at the Théâtre Italien, which was always glad to applaud and acclaim her. Her talents were ever growing greater, and showed how the artist in her was always zealous to better herself, was never satisfied, always seeking and striving by dint of dogged, ceaseless and relentless work to make each day mark some progress, endeavouring after a perfection and an ideal, which were perhaps impossible of definition and attainment, but ever pursued with tireless intelligence and tenacity and courage. At this time one critic thus speaks of her: "It is now three years that

Marie Malibran

Mme. Malibran has been on the operatic stage, and her advance is noticeable, though some unevennesses in her execution were observable. Passionately devoted, as she is, to the study of her art, she used sometimes to betray something of a sense of fatigue in her performance; sometimes her enormous range betrayed her. Of late, there has been no occasion to make this comment; her talent has reached the summit of its power; despite her youth, it may be said that in her there is combined a wonderful professional, a great actress, and a charming personality. Thus, when in November, 1830, she returned to Paris to play Desdemona, her voice had gained a tinge of vigour and intensity in the deep notes, and in the high notes was almost always under the same absolute control. Lovers of music will not easily forget their pleasure when, in the *Barber of Seville*, they, for the first time, saw her singing together with Lablache. Never a singer that had been more popular, or excited more frantic enthusiasm than she, because she lets herself go in Italian opera and has a dramatic expression, such as this theatre had never before witnessed. Critics carp at her, not altogether unjustly, for overacting her parts; but, on the boards, she attracts and fascinates and carries every one with her,

even those who, when the curtain has fallen, set to and give vent to this reproach."[1]

At Paris Mme. Malibran rediscovered all of her admirers, recovered all her old success in the works which had established her extraordinary fame as a girl, in *Tancredi*, *The Barber of Seville*, *Romeo e Giulietta*, *La Gazza Ladra*, *Cenerentola*. It was not her fault that the stock of the Théâtre Italien presented something of an unchangeable roundabout; she would certainly never have asked for anything better than to have her part in enriching it, and her unwearied zest would not have recoiled before any exertion to attain this end. But Bellini's first operas, which had had such vogue in Italy, had not yet penetrated so far north, and his two masterpieces, *Norma* and *La Sonnambula*, were not yet born; both appeared in 1831. Mme. Malibran was to light on them in the course of her first journey beyond the Alps, and, as Mme. Pasta's successor,[2] was to give them an interpretation so wonderful and unexpected, so sublime, that her glory was to wax even greater, and the enthusiasm evoked by her genius scale heights unknown until then, even in this country of generous appreciation.

[1] *Biographie universelle et portative des contemporains.*
[2] *Ibid.*

It is interesting that this time Mme. Malibran once more was acting in conjunction with Mme. Méric-Lalande, who had been criticized by her, as we said, rather severely, and certainly somewhat superficially, in London, and had now been summoned to Paris by M. Laurent, the director of the Théâtre Italien. Stranger still, both artists played together in *Semiramide*, but Mme. Malibran surrendered the title-rôle to Mme. Lalande, and took that of Arsace herself; and she achieved as great a success in this character. She also acted with Mme. Lalande in *Tancredi* at the latter's benefit. Moreover, it must be assumed she had by this time thought better of this singer, who was really distinguished, and ended by doing her full justice; for, on February 10, 1836, she wrote a friendly letter, enclosing a ring, asking her to accept this little ornament as "a token of her regard and high esteem."

I mentioned *Tancredi* once again just now, and this is the right place to insert an amusing anecdote and stating a fact that shows that tact and readiness were never absent from Mme. Malibran. She was very intimate with General La Fayette, who was very fond of her, and was, later on, to afford her a great deal of help in the proceedings for the annulling of her marriage;

but the original circumstances of their first acquaintanceship are unknown. The incident is worth recalling. It was towards the close of 1830, and every one knows how immensely popular the general then was. The curtain was rising at the Théâtre Italien on the first act of *Tancredi*, and La Fayette was present; on entering the house, he had been cheered by the crowd: he was seated in a box near the stage, with everyone's eyes glued on to him. Mme. Malibran walked on to the stage as Tancred, helmeted, and girt with her sword: before starting her song, she looked straight at La Fayette, drew her sword, and proudly saluted the old soldier. It may be imagined that, at this time, when every heart was steadily boiling over with emotion, this unexpected and happy touch won thunderous applause.

In the course of this new season, Mme. Malibran added a new opera to her repertory. She got up the principal rôle of an old comedy of Gnecco, *La Prova d'un' opera seria*, to play it at Lablache's benefit. It was not indeed a task calculated to give her much trouble or take up much time. But it is impossible to suppose for one instant that she remained inactive in this respect; and if her ordinary work did not involve much new study, she certainly

devised means of conscientiously filling up all her time. Paris was the same as London; her singing was sought after by society as much as it was appreciated at the opera, so that every day found her beset with invitations. For herself, the impetuous mettle of her temperament made her hanker after pleasure with the same spiritedness that she put into her work; and the relaxations she enjoyed were far from always being the least laborious. She was a fearless horsewoman, and in the early hours would start riding, leaving off only in time for rehearsals, even if she did not mount her steed the moment rehearsals were over. And, o'night, after the performance, either in one of the society functions, where her talents were appraised very highly, or in her own friendly circles, where she was equally lavish, she would sing, laugh, dance, up to four or five a.m. She was always working on wires, never rested, used herself up in every way, with all her natural energy, never thinking of the morrow, and the morrow's tired nerves, never regarding her strength as a limited quantity, scoffing at everything, provided only she did what she liked.

Thus her health sometimes gave out under this regimen, and she, now and then, could not carry out her public engagements. This letter

which she one day sent to M. Severini, the manager of the Théâtre Italien, is an instance :—

"My dear Severina,—

"Both I and my work we are as nothing, whether compared or not compared with the vast eternity of the Lord Our God. But even He, God though He was, did require one day's rest after six days' creating of all things. I have only worked and created for one miserable day, and, as you may well think, one day's rest is not enough for me. I cannot, like Penelope, disenravel on the following day the fatigue of the previous day; I am just the opposite. On the day before I am all right; the day after, I am no good. When I got home last night, I was very ill; to-day I have pains all over, or, rather, all my limbs are stiff. My fingers can hardly scribble these few words.

"So then, my dear Severini, no Malibran for you to-morrow. I can't even manage *Rosina*.

"Do pity this poor, stiff-necked soul.

"M.-F. MALIBRAN.

"*Wednesday evening.*"

Her friend, Countess Merlin, tells a story, that one day Mme. Malibran had promised to sing at her house at a big social function,

and suddenly discovered that the Theâtre Italien (which was ordinarily open that night) had, nevertheless, arranged for that evening a special benefit performance in which she was to sing. To consummate the ill-luck, she was down to act the day after as well. She vainly attempted to induce M. Laurent, the director, to postpone the performance; and when he begged her earnestly not to go to the reception to which she had been invited, especially in considering next day and the exertion it would mean for her, she replied: "Never! I shall go and sing in the opera, because it is my duty! afterwards I shall go and see Mme. Merlin, because it is my pleasure." Mme. Merlin adds: "At one o'clock in the morning, Maria, after playing *Semiramide*, came to my reception, sang up to two or three o'clock, had supper, danced, and went home at daybreak."[1]

[1] The *Revue de Paris* contains this report: "On Friday 7th January [1831] there was a concert given at Countess Merlin's house. The guests included, as in past years, a very large number of the music-lovers in Parisian good society. One must go to Mme. Merlin to hear good music. One can listen there; there is no impatience written large on the hearers' countenances for the concert to end. Rossini was at the piano. Mme. Merlin, Mme. Rimbault, M. Blanchart and Mme. de Sparre were playing with the artists of the Italian Theatre, Mme. Malibran, MM. David, Lablache and

Such, then, was she as a woman, ever reckless, independent in every sense, and suffering nothing to hinder her will. Mme. Merlin gives us another curious example of this, which might have had serious consequences :—

"She did not always get off scot-free from her pranks, and atoned for them sometimes in her health, but then she used to do marvels.

"Thus, once, after being at a ball the night before she was to perform, she got up at noon, went out riding without taking any food, and returned home at six o'clock. As soon as dinner was over, she was due at the theatre. She dressed quickly to take up the part of Arsace, but this poor Arsace, despite his brave helmet and his curly hair, was nervous and tired, after a hurried meal, and slipped and

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Donzelli. Mme. Merlin was up to her best ; her voice was strong and supple. Many well-known ladies were among the audience." "Monday, 10th January, a concert at M. Bonfils'. Great splendour; a magnificent reception; ladies from the Faubourg St. Germain and La Chaussée d'Antin, dukes, brokers, and foreigners from every country. Rossini at the piano, all the professional singers, Mme. Malibran, Mme. Tadolini, MM. David, Lablache, Donzelli and Zucchelli ; the programme was very choice : amongst other things, a duet of Fioravanti, sung by Mme. Malibran and Lablache, a *terzetto* out of the opera *La Pietra di Paragone*, sung by Lablache, Donzelli and Zucchelli, an air out of *Donna Caritea* sung by Mme. Malibran, and a quintet out of *Matilda di Shabran*."

fainted just when she was to appear. Maria was brought back to her room, and every one vied in proffering service. The manager was nonplussed and quite lost his head; a score of bottles were opened with which to revive the patient: and, unluckily, amongst these last, was a cup with a mixture of oil and alkali, which Maria used to use for skin friction to cure a sore throat. An over-zealous friend brought this near her lips, and she applied it . . . and, instantaneously, huge blisters reared themselves on that smooth mouth! What was one to do? She could not appear on the stage. Alter the programme? Too late. Well then? 'Wait a bit,' said Maria, who had come to her senses; 'Just wait; I'll manage it.' She took a pair of scissors which lay at hand, stood up in front of her mirror, and swiftly and dauntlessly cut the puffed-up skin on her lips right through. Her lips were left in an undescribable condition; but Maria played her part as Arsace, and sang splendidly against Mlle. Sontag as Semiramis."

The courage she was capable of and the sense of duty she showed when her indiscretion put her at a disadvantage with the public are evident. In fact, she felt her responsibilities towards her public much more than certain artists of that time who might be named.

And yet it may well be thought that her audience would have pardoned her a few slips, as long as they could enjoy her great talents; gifts to which her father, old Garcia, who never erred on the side of leniency and kindliness, at this time testified in this striking manner.

A niece of Garcia's, by his brother, no doubt his pupil as well, wanted to come out on the stage about this time, and Garcia wrote to Benelli, a theatrical agent at Bologna, in the hope of getting her an opening in Italy. "She has," he said, "a very fine *soprano sfogato* voice, but," he added, "I should not like her to make a start here in Paris, because, after Mme. Malibran, any singer must be a supreme actress in both comedy and tragedy; and I do not think my niece is *as sublime as her cousin* in action on the stage, though her voice may be better. In Italy there is less fineness required in acting than in France, and that is why I want her to appear first in a good Italian theatre, which would ensure her subsequent success in Paris." This is the best possible certificate to Mme. Malibran's talents from a competent and severe judge.

The season of 1830–1831 was as brilliant for Mme. Malibran as the previous; and a glance through the files of the newspapers of that time

will indicate something of the admiration she never ceased to arouse. Yet, towards the end, her voice showed some signs of becoming tired, so much so that she decided to rest all of the summer, and not, as usual, to return to London. The *Revue musicale* of April 30, 1831, is the source of this information: "The Théâtre Italien closed its doors to-day. Some of the singers have accepted engagements at the London Theatre, and are starting at once. Mme. Malibran has had a good offer from Bologna, but has declined it, as she wishes to rest all of this summer, to get ready for the winter's work. We must congratulate her on this resolve, which will restore elasticity and freshness to her voice, the improvement of which is sometimes very perceptible."[1]

[1] About this time Ludwig Börne's *Briefe aus Paris*, 1830 and 1831, was published at Hamburg (translated into French by F. Guéran, Paris, Paulin, 1832, *Lettres écrites de Paris pendant les années, 1830 et 1831*). The *Revue musicale*, in reviewing this work, reprinted this passage, which refers to Mme. Malibran, and tempers admiration with that analytical spirit, which certain Germans so affect, and often overdo:—

"*26th January*, 1831.

"There must have been some special reason for your not coming yesterday to hear *Otello* and Mme. Malibran as Desdemona . . . What would you have felt, if it so stirred me! Me-seemed, my heart was changed into a harp on which angels were playing; and my ear heard

But this rest, it seems, did not prove as efficacious as she might have desired, although her return to the Théâtre Italien in *La Gazza Ladra* on November 8, 1831, was a great success, as the *Revue de Paris* witnesses: "Mme. Malibran has been restored to us with all her freshness, charm, and the brightness of her genius. She was welcomed back with the enthusiasm which will, we hope, be yet for long evoked by her fertile and fearless inventiveness, tempered by a fine taste which suppresses any slight lapses. This great singer would, by herself, draw a large audience; and she is supported by Rubini, who maintained his reputation as the first tenor of Italy beside her, and by Lablache, that admirable singer, and yet even more notable actor. Mme. Malibran's first performance on her return was *La Gazza*

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from within. . . . In a real panic I clung and held fast to the earthly words, in order not to lose my foothold, and be drawn up on high by the mystic chant. God, at her birth, gave Mme. Malibran a birth certificate with His sign manual, which no one can forge. It was like a flowered prairie, all a-glitter with every emotion of man, gentle or haughty, lowly or noble, sweet or bitter, with all the glory of hue, all the scent and the enticements of every kind of flower. . . . Her singing proceeded not only from her mouth, but out of every limb of her body. Her notes fell like sparks from her eyes, flowed out from her finger-tips, and down from the sheen of her hair. If she were silent, her song rang out all the same."

Ladra. All the music-lovers were at their posts, in the orchestra, as well as in the boxes. If a quite proper emotion at first prèvented Mme. Malibran from justifying the applause which caused her perturbation, she soon regained all the strength in her voice in the duet, *Come frenar il pianto.* Should we censure an excessive susceptibility to which we owe those so often sublime flights of a passionate song?" But, after playing in *La Gazza Ladra,* and once again in *Otello* and *La prova d'un' opera seria,* Mme. Malibran had perforce to quit the stage for several weeks; and, if the ailment was not serious, it was long and considerable. She could not take her place again until January 8, 1832, in a great concert in which she, de Bériot, Henri Herz, Santini, Bordogni, Rubini, Lablache, Mme. Tadolini, and Mme. Schröder-Devrient all took parts. And her health was still so uncertain that the *Revue musicale* in its review of the entertainment, could not help admitting the vexatious fact, as well as her heroic efforts to quell her weakness in public. After speaking of all the artists who had taken part in the concert this journal adds: "Last we mention Mme. Malibran, who only sang two pieces, but these were selected and at the end of the programme: Mercadante's air,

Se m'abbandoni, and the duet in *La Gazza Ladra*. She was in great pain, and had a very bad cold; the phrases of the *récitatif* in the air were interrupted by violent fits of coughing; it was hardly deemed possible she should persevere. The whole audience seemed somehow to share her sufferings in an inexpressible sympathy: yet, despite the weakening of her voice, she succeeded in making her listeners lose all sense of her own complaint. At each phrase of the song pity gave place to admiration; and, at each pause, the illness took the upper hand and revived compassion. This alternation of distress and pleasure lasted as long as she was facing the audience. It was a victory which only a great artist can win: but a victory boding ill for the conqueror. Certainly I myself am more than ever convinced that Mme. Malibran is the greatest singer of our day: but she ought not to buy glory by ruining or even sacrificing her future."

I have already said that Countess Merlin's book, valuable as it is for certain personal memories, was very dubious as an accurate record of her artistic career. This is another instance. Mme. Merlin, for some reason or other, talks of a grudge borne by a certain section of the public against Mme. Malibran,

and says: "On January 8, 1832, she played *Otello* as a farewell performance. Her noble acting, the moving accents of her voice, were unsurpassable. The audience was smitten with her, and returned to their allegiance in a spirit of love, or, it may be, remorse. But it was too late. It was her swan-song at Paris, and, like a white swan, Maria had spread her wings, and was to fly away for ever." Now we have seen what this alleged last performance of *Otello* was: it comes down to two songs at a concert. The only true touch in Countess Merlin's dramatic tale is that this was Mme. Malibran's last appearance before her Parisian admirers. Further, there was absolutely no intention in the fact, as the writer seems to be striving to convince herself; it was the mere work of chance and circumstance. Mme. Malibran was too ill to go on the stage, and physically incapable of completing the season she had commenced, and was, therefore, condemned to several weeks' rest: she only sang in public again on March 24 in a concert with de Bériot at the Théâtre de la Monnaie at Brussels.[1] It

[1] This is the programme of the concert: 1. Overture (Weber); 2. Air, with variations, for the piano, by Henri Herz, played by Henri de Fiennes; 3. Cavatina in *Otello* (Rossini), sung by Mme. Malibran; 4. Air, with variations, written and played by Charles de Bériot; 5. *Deep Sea* (an

will soon be seen that her first journey to Italy not on any engagement was entirely unpremeditated and unexpected, the result of her always whimsical temperament; not in the least the outcome of any quarrel with the French public she adored, the first founders of her celebrity, of whom she never dreamed of complaining. Then, as things turned out, circumstances so shaped themselves, what with the invitations she received on all sides, her professional or private predilections (these last not the least important), and lastly her early and sudden death, that she never had the chance of reappearing at Paris, to which town she was always going back, and always with joy. Chance, fatality, if you like; her will, no.

English ballad), and French romances (Mme. Malibran); 6. Overture by Snel; 7. Fantasy for 'cello, composed and played by Platel; 8. Variations on *Cenerentola*—Rossini—(Mme. Malibran); 9. Violin concerto, composed and played by de Bériot; 10. *Bonheur de se revoir* and *Le petit tambour* (Mme. Malibran).

"Any one who has not heard Mme. Malibran, cannot conceive all the wonders of her voice, which is now full, grave and impressive, and then, all at once, sweet, flute-like and light . . ." (*Le Courrier Belge*).

CHAPTER VII

At Brussels—Sudden departure for Italy with Lablache and de Bériot—Hears of father's death at Rome—Appears for first time at Teatro Valle, then engaged for Naples, and universal admiration—She and King of Naples—Plays at Bologna—The violinist, Ole Bull—Returns to Rome—At Horace Vernet's and Académie de France—Journey to Brussels.

THIS chapter brings us on to the most astonishingly active time of Mme. Malibran's life. Up to this point, like most singers in Italian opera, she had simply divided her energies between Paris and London. But, as soon as she set foot on Italian soil, she was to transfuse this country with the fame of the grandeur, originality, freshness, and the grips of her talent, that, after one moment's surprise and hesitation on her hearers' part, she was to excite an enthusiasm so great that soon every city would be contending and striving for her at her weight in gold, offering her terms till then unimagined, and leaving not one instant of peace or quiet. Rome, Naples, Milan, Venice, Lucca, Bologna, Sinigaglia, not one of these but was after her, greedy to

hear her, jealous of the right of admiration, and emulous to applaud her. To satisfy their requirements, every day she was travelling from one to another, coursing along the main roads ceaselessly, here to-day and gone to-morrow, breaking into a season at Naples to go and receive her meed of cheers at Rome, thence to return to Naples as fast as she could fly ; then leaping from Italy to England, crossing over six hundred leagues of land and sea to go to London, where she sang Bellini's *Sonnambula* in English, the very opera she had just been rendering in Italian to the writer's fellow-countrymen. Whilst at London she mastered *Fidelio* and excelled in it ; in Bath, Liverpool and Manchester she sang Bach's or Händel's oratorios, displaying in them a wealth of matchless qualities of style and expression. In England she did not fear coming forward in Balfe's or Chelard's unpublished works, whilst in Naples she learned and created new operas by Pacini, Vaccaj, Coccia and Persiani. Wherever she betook herself, enchanting her public, intoxicated with applause, proud of her triumphs, sparing neither time nor trouble nor study to earn her cheers, she yet by way of pastime managed from time to time to give a concert in Belgium or Germany. And, all this while, she

was laughing, merry, riding, going on tiring explorations, and sometimes dangerous excursions; nor did she ever forget the claims of poverty, but scattered alms by the way; in fact, she consumed life to the full, in every way, at every end at once; was always brave, hard-working, devoted to her duty, to her art, as much as to her relaxations; always unwilling to sacrifice pleasure to art, and doing more work than three well-endowed human beings could get through. This, then, is the woman whose career we are to follow for the four years before she breathed her last.

Mme. Malibran had gone to Brussels to take a rest, and there, as we say, had, with de Bériot, given a big concert. She left quite suddenly and on a mere impulse for Italy. Lablache was returning from London by way of Belgium, on his way, by Paris and Milan, to Rome and Naples; and stopped in Brussels to call on her. "Why not come and do a tour in Italy?" he asked her. One word sufficed for her adventurous nature; the idea pleased her, and, with her usual quickness, she accepted it, and proposed starting off with him. But Lablache was in a hurry, and had to start next day. Well, what of that? In less than twenty-four hours, they say, she had got ready to set out

on the journey, and accompany him. Anyhow, late in May, 1832, Lablache, Mme. Malibran and de Bériot left Brussels, and took the road to Italy together. They first repaired to Milan, whence, after a few days' rest, Mme. Malibran went to Rome. As may be supposed, as soon as she reached Italy, the wish was shown everywhere to see and hear her. Thus, as soon as she was in Rome, the management of the Teatro Valle hastened to request some performances of her. She entered into a contract for a month. But a few days before her first performance she suddenly learned the sadness of her father's death.[1] The news first came to her ears through the papers, and she would not believe it, would not accept the evidence, in her grief clung to impossible hopes, as this letter shows, which she at once dispatched to her friend Louis Viardot :—

"Rome, 21*st June*, 1832.

"I suppose it is a doom we must always expect and ought to take philosophically when it comes to ourselves. In so short a time

[1] Garcia died, not on June 2, as Fétis says in the *Biographie universelle des Musiciens*, but on the 9th, as Fétis himself stated in his paper, the *Revue musicale*. But Mme. Merlin also was wrong in saying that Mme. Malibran went to Italy in July ; as we see she was already in Rome in June.

to see so many people carried away, and, amongst them, my best friend, my poor father! . . . I only knew this appalling loss had befallen me this afternoon at three o'clock, thanks to the French Ambassadress, who for the two days past had given me the papers to read; we there heard of this frightful new revolution.[1] To-day they told Ch . . . the sad news, to keep it from my ears; I soon discovered what he was in vain trying to conceal.

"My poor friend! The keen anguish I feel, the stab of pain piercing my heart every moment hundreds of times. Still I can't believe it without some official news. I am writing to my mother, and dare not say what I have been told. You know I didn't want to answer this letter, which neither you nor I could imagine came from her. But I have been taking up my pen time after time, and at last could not hold out against the yearning to write and hear their news; and since the day before yesterday, when I came to know of the last events in Paris, I have been a prey to such anxiety for my father, who might have been mixed up in the affair, perhaps whilst going

[1] She is referring to the terrible insurrection of the Republicans of June 5 and 6, 1832, which filled the Paris streets with blood, on the occasion of General Lamarque's funeral.

to the funeral, that I was at last going to write, when suddenly I received this fatal news. . . .

"At least reassure me about your own self and Léon. Tell us, as it is two months since we received news, tell me if you have been through any danger. If cholera or revolution had carried the *other man* off! Tell me I need not weep for my father's death. . . . Louis, for two months I have had no news of Madame L. . . .; since her departure not one letter. I cannot stand the suspense. Make her write to me at Rome, No. 45, Piazza della Minerva. I am awaiting a letter from you like a person who has had a fit, hardly left off crying, and is expecting some slight alleviation of her pain. But unfortunately I cannot break the contract I entered into here twelve days ago to play for one month three times a week. The manager has gone to a great deal of expense, the costumes are ready, as also the scenery; he has engaged several supers for this purpose. You know my ways: do not blame me. The day after the feast of St. Peter I shall start with *Otello*. It is a poor company.

"Kiss mother for me, my sister, my brother, and . . . No, it can't be true, the papers are lying; if you could only kiss me for him!

"Your sincere friend,

"M.-F. MALIBRAN."

But the news, unfortunately, was true, as we have seen. Garcia was dead, at the early age of forty-seven, a prey to a lung complaint.

It will readily be believed that Mme. Malibran's first appearance on an Italian stage was a great event. The enormous reputation of the singer sufficiently justified the impatience of those who wished to hear her, as soon as it became known in Rome that she was going to play there. The announcement of her performances had been so well advertised that the management of the Teatro Valle thought fit to profit by the circumstance to increase the price of places to a terrific extent; some were quadrupled. Naturally, the audience were a little fretful, and their discontent might have been harmful to the artist, as it showed itself on the first night in well-sustained hoots and whistling; which were, however, aimed at the *impresa*, not the singer, who, as we learn from this note in the *Revue musicale*, carried all before her: "News recently arrived from Rome tells of the success and enthusiasm evoked by Mme. Malibran in her first and subsequent performances. The Romans, who have never heard the like of this great singer, do her boundless homage. She started at Rome in the Teatro Valle, the night of June 30 last, singing in Rossini's

Otello, and evoking loud plaudits and cheers from all parts of the house. Salvi, the tenor who was singing with her, was very well received by the public."[1]

This triumph, the fame of which spread throughout all Italy, drew the special attention of Barbaja, the celebrated *impresario* of the two royal theatres of Naples, the San Carlo and the Fondo. Barbaja at once offered Mme. Malibran an engagement for twelve performances at these two theatres, which she accepted; and, as soon as ever she had finished her contract at Rome, she hurried

[1] *Revue musicale*, August 11, 1832: "Mme. Malibran's letter to Louis Viardot shows that from the time of the arrival at Rome she was on friendly terms with the French Embassy; she was, also, at once received at the Villa Medici and welcomed, as we may imagine, by Horace Vernet, then the director of the Academy of France. There is a letter to the *Revue de Paris*, on July 12, bearing on this subject: 'The heat is frightful; and, if it does not prevent the Romans from going to the theatre, despite the increased prices for seats, it is that we have Mme. Malibran here. The six performances she has given have all been followed with the same eager attention. With the support of M. de Bériot she afforded us two delightful evenings at M. Horace Vernet's house. The art of painting is glad to render to music the respects it so willingly gives: M. Horace has painted the portraits of these two musicians with the vigour and exactitude which they put into an air with variations, and has presented it to them. We heard these passing minstrels and troubadours, Tuesday last, at a brilliant reception at the French Ambassador's, and . . . .'"

away to Naples, where on August 6 she was to start, as usual, with *Otello*. The *Revue musicale* is once again our authority on her reception in that city: "Our Neapolitan correspondent informs us that Mme. Malibran appeared there on August 6 at the Fondo Theatre, and had a great success. She was singing the part of Desdemona. Her heartfelt emotion at first made her unable to utilize all her powers, but she soon recovered, and her performance that evening was one round of applause. Though the prices were trebled, the ambassadors of Russia and Austria were obliged to share a *quatrième à côté*, as they had not booked their box in time.[1] The wonderful singer will go on to act in *Cenerentola* and *La Gazza Ladra* at the Fondo, and, later on, probably, the character of Arsace at the San Carlo with M. Lablache and Mlle. de Begnis. In the autumn she is engaged at Bologna, and in the winter at Milan."[2]

On September 7, after several performances at the Fondo, Mme. Malibran presented her-

[1] This is the fact: the tale runs that these two personages, Count von Stackelberg and Count von Lebzellern, were very uncomfortably placed, right in front of the glare of the footlights: as a special favour to them, these were put out that evening.

[2] *Revue musicale*, August 25, 1832.

self at the San Carlo, playing the *Barber of Seville*, and the third act of Zingarelli's *Romeo e Giulietta*. The King of Naples[1] was to be present at this representation, but, strange to say, she was rather irritated at the fact, because she, with her impetuous and overstrung nature, with her instinctive and incalculable methods of acting, required to be applauded by the public, to be set on fire by acclamation, by feeling the enthusiasm of the audience, whom she knew how to inflame to their very heart-strings, their most secret being; she needed public cheering to set herself in motion, to bring out the fulness of her talents up to their highest value and into the open, to afford her powers the opportunity of their greatest expansion. But she had been told, that when the King was at the theatre, nobody might clap his hands until he gave the signal for applause; and this prospect disquieted and perturbed her. So she begged an audience of the Sovereign, confessed her apprehensions, assured him that if she did not feel heartened and brought up to the sticking-point by the applause to which she was used, she could not possibly show what she was, and would certainly fall below her own standard. The King reassured her, with

[1] King Ferdinand II.

a smile on his face, and promised to set the example, and draw the general public after him. Still she was dissatisfied. "Sire, that is not all. I am usually encouraged by the audience from the moment I appear on the stage, before ever I sing one note; and, if I begin before I hear the bravos ringing out, I am no good, and utterly helpless." "Very well," the King replied. "Have no fear; I will clap you the instant you come on." She left the royal presence delighted.

But that night she was almost as ill at ease. Just when she was coming on the stage, she was in the wings opposite to the royal box, and saw the royal eyes looking towards her; so she stared back into his eyes, and, with a graceful gesture, lifted both of her arms up, and brought them together as though she were clapping her hands. The King signed to her that he understood, and she had hardly stepped on to the stage before he gave the signal, and the whole house responded with enormous vigour. She was as successful at the San Carlo as she had been at the Fondo.

During the interval, in which the two theatres were closed for the nine days' feast of St. Jannarius (September 20–28), Mme. Malibran made an excursion to Rome to give by invita-

tion two performances of the *Barber of Seville;* thence she returned to conclude her Naples engagement; but she was dissatisfied with herself, as she states in a letter to Mme. Merlin: "I have had a successful time here, but am not pleased with myself. I have reason to think I am appreciated, but am not applauded in the theatre, and the spark of life is thus withdrawn from me. Can one sing without? . . . You might say they are deaf. But why? Do I sing badly? Not in the least. Simply and solely because I am too thin. You don't understand? Well, so much the worse; I won't explain myself any further." For any one who held the key of the situation, the solution was that the King of Naples was on very good terms with another *prima donna*, Mme. Ronzi de Begnis, a very distinguished artist indeed, who was piqued at Mme. Malibran's ascendancy; so that the King would not applaud her when he attended the theatre, and his absence diminished the numbers in the pit. Furthermore, Mme. Ronzi de Begnis was blessed with a good figure; and this made Mme. Malibran write: "I am too thin."

For all this we must take it either that, when writing this letter to her friend, she was in one of those moody fits so common with her, which

made her overstate and magnify on the slightest pretext, or that things quickly changed with her in this respect very notably ; for this letter to her friend, the famous editor, Troupenas, addressed from Naples three days after she left that city, will give some idea of the welcome she received from the public, and the way it was attested :— [1]

"NAPLES, *6th Oct.* 1832.

"The interest which, doubtless, you take in Mme. Malibran's successes (who has on several occasions spoken to me of you as one of her best friends) gives me reason to hope you will be glad to receive details of her successes at Naples, facts which no one will be able to contest.

"Really, our public was, at first, rather inclined to jib against so world-wide a reputation,

[1] Troupenas was then one of the greatest musical editors in Paris ; he published the numerous romances composed by Mme. Malibran, to whom he was devoted. This letter was sent by him to the *Revue musicale*, which printed it unsigned on October 27. I have managed to discover the writer's name, till now unknown. He was Guillaume Cottrau, a very distinguished composer, a Frenchman, who had settled in Naples. His son, Giulio Cottrau, became an Italian subject, and was also a fine and neat musical writer, whose works were well received by the public. Guillaume Cottrau (of whom I shall have occasion to speak later on) had attached himself to Mme. Malibran, as soon as she arrived at Naples.

and would have liked to have maintained an attitude of reserve worthy of the High Court of Appeal; but very soon they recovered from the bewilderment into which a genius so much out of the ordinary, so sublimely natural, had thrown them, and exuberated into a boundless enthusiasm, unparalleled in our theatrical annals, as the oldest of our music-lovers admit. Seventeen performances, with double prices, the subscription-lists suspended, old operas like *Otello*, *Cenerentola*, *La Gazza Ladra*—all of these, circumstances as unlucky as you could have in a country where there are no private incomes, where the subscribers constitute a very jealous class, and have long since wearied of Rossini's manner and are greedy for novelties—yet, for Mme. Malibran, a series of increasing triumphs. But the palm was reserved for her last appearance, Monday last, in *La Gazza Ladra*. The most exalted imagination, even in dwelling on the tales of the games in the Roman circus, would fail of giving an idea of this thrilling spectacle—the huge space of the San Carlo Theatre, packed beyond endurance, echoing with cheers, acclamation, stamping, cries of admiration. The object of these unanimous paroxysms, which were repeated twenty-five times during the piece, who was recalled six times after the fall of the

curtain by an adoring throng which would not be reconciled to the idea of a parting that might be eternal, could not escape, except by sending kisses to the audience from the tips of her fingers, and indicating, with an expressive and graceful gesture, that she was exhausted after playing a tiring part, and especially after such lively feelings of gratitude. But this is not all. The most enthusiastic—and there were a goodish number—crowded outside the stage entrance; and, as soon as they recognized Mme. Malibran's sedan-chair, they escorted her to her hotel with resounding cheers, which stirred all the Via di Toledo, and saluted with even more vigour in the courtyard of the Barbaja palace, whilst she was mounting the stairs. But a still better proof of the extraordinary impression Mme. Malibran has made on us all, and the gigantic improvement she has brought about in so short a time in our taste, is what happened the day before yesterday, two days after her leaving us, at the San Carlo. They were giving a popular opera, *L'Esule di Roma*, by Donizetti, the one which, undeniably, of all those acted in the last ten years has several times been the most successful. Lablache, who was excellent in his part as Marino, was appearing for the first time since his return;

Mme. Ronzi de Begnis, whose acting, voice, and general manner have really improved greatly since her longish retirement from the stage—one year ago she was the public favourite—replaced Mlle. Tosi, who was, in any case, very second-rate. But, despite all this, the reception was unimaginably cold, and some partisans' thin cheers were even hushed down at the end of passages which usually are certain of effectiveness, such as the trio in the first act and the duet in the second.

"But there is nothing surprising in this apathy: the gleaming meteor has vanished into space, leaving us plunged in a twilight, to which our weak eyes had been able to accustom themselves bit by bit, and now feel to be unbearable after such sheets of radiance; for the joys of the stage turn again for no man, and the tide that brought us Mme. Malibran has ebbed for ever. In fact, for three whole days—amongst the educated of a people whose public life, pent up in public amusements, finds no other outlet for their need of activity, for a free manifestation of thought elsewhere suppressed—for all this time, there is no talk save of the departed, whose very reality is almost questioned in the hope of eliciting in the reply a reason to doubt of it; and, when this expectation is foiled, we

come back to the hope, which is more or less distant, of seeing this magic singer once again. The Government, they say, which is taking over the responsibility for last year's great theatrical enterprises, has made her most brilliant offers.

"G. COTTRAU."

But, whatever she may have said, we shall see Mme. Malibran return to Naples, not only the year following, but every year afterwards, and always making the same enchantress's spell on her audience. But we must not anticipate.

Whilst she was still at Naples, Azzolini, the *impresario* of Bologna, had come to hear her, was struck with wonder, and proposed a number of performances at that city. She accepted; and when her contract with Barbaja was finished on October 3, she left Naples for Bologna, where she enthralled the public from the first, on October 13, in *La Gazza Ladra*. Her triumphs were greater even in *Tancredi*, *Otello*, and, lastly, and above all, in *I Capuleti ed i Montecchi* (by Bellini), which she played for the first time.[1]

With Mme. Malibran's first residence at

[1] It is a curious thing that Mme. Malibran acted in those distinct operas founded on the same powerful dramatic theme, so suited to her supreme powers of pathos and

Bologna an incident is connected in which the famous Norwegian violinist, Ole Bull, was involved, then still young and almost unknown. The Philharmonic Society of Bologna, the president of which was Marquess Zampieri, was going to give a concert, and had made sure of the co-operation of Mme. Malibran and de Bériot. Everything was going without a hitch, when, at the eleventh hour, the two artists, rightly or wrongly upset by some chance occurrence, withdrew their promise and refused to take part in the concert. This, as may be thought, caused a great stir in the town and in

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passion: *Romeo e Giulietta* by Zingarelli, *Giulietta e Romeo* by Vaccaj, and *I Capuleti ed i Montecchi* by Bellini. Regarding the performance of the last-named piece at Bologna, Madame Merlin wrote: "Maria's mind, which was always fertile in new inspirations, made the last scene in this play sublime. When drawing near Giulietta's deathbed, she turned round on the opposite side, in front of the audience, so as to give Juliet time to leave her bed: then she crouched down over the bed to find her, and, when foiled, she stretched forth her arms to look for her with an inconceivable terror, raised her eyes, and saw her standing in front of her. . . . Then, instead of rushing up to her and crying out *Giulietta!* she approached in silence, touched her head, handled her arms, shoulders, neck, eyes in turn; and then, all at once in a strangled voice, broken low and telling from the depths of her heart, she said, *Giulietta!* . . . This one word had a magical effect on the audience; every one felt an icy shiver, before ever she uttered it, and, several times at Bologna, women whom it turned faint to hear her had to be carried out of the theatre."

the minds of the Philharmonic Society. What were they to do? Mme. Colbran-Rossini was first approached—she lived in retirement at Bologna, and, though she had left the stage for over ten years, had retained great renown throughout Italy—and consented to intercede with Mme. Malibran. But who was there so presumptuous as to under-study de Bériot? They were in their last straits, the day of the concert was fixed, all was ready, when Mme. Rossini, by mere chance walking through a street, stopped outside an inn, the *Casa Soldati*, and was struck by the notes of a violin played with consummate skill. She was surprised, made inquiries, and instantly informed Marquess Zampieri of her discovery. He, without losing any time, set out for the inn, found out that the violinist who had fascinated Mme. Rossini was a young stranger only recently arrived, called Ole Bull; he summoned him to his presence.

Ole Bull was then twenty-two years old. He had just left France, where the attempt to commit suicide in Paris had interested in him a philanthropist, who furnished him with the means of making an artist's journey into Italy. But, just then, after only a few days in Bologna, an unforeseen delay in the remission of the

money had put him in great difficulties, almost penniless. Marquess Zampieri told him the occasion of his visit, mentioned the concert at which de Bériot was to have played, had he not hurt his left hand (this was de Bériot's pretext, true or untrue), and suggested that Ole Bull should take his place ; but he wanted to hear him play first. Ole Bull did not require to be asked twice ; he snatched up his violin, played a piece ; and his hearer was delighted, and at once entered into arrangements. When the night came, the hall was thronged with all the magnificence and aristocracy of Bologna, the Grand Duke of Tuscany and Prince Poniatowski in the royal box, Mme. Malibran herself together with de Bériot present, the latter's arm in a sling. Ole Bull came forward. The audience was only half satisfied with the programme, and showed him but little sympathy, receiving him with great coldness. But they thawed after his first piece ; and, after the second, the player received a wild ovation, rounds of applause and repeated re-calls. This much justice must be done to de Bériot, that he was not the last to shout bravo, and to acclaim his young rival, whose originality and gifts surprised and enchanted him.[1]

The date of this incident does not correspond with the

Mme. Malibran left Bologna, where her success had been as great as at Naples, to enjoy a few weeks' freedom at Rome. I believe that an engagement had been offered her then at Milan, at least so the papers say; but she was tired and somewhat unwell, and declined it, so as to take the rest she so badly needed. Legouvé met her at Rome at Horace Vernet's house; and I am the more willing to quote the story of this meeting from him, if only for the little story, which affords another proof of the artistic taste of this extraordinary woman :—

"The autumn of 1832 I recollect, as if burned into my memory. It was my first journey to

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date assigned by Fétis for Ole Bull's first voyage to Italy. But it holds good, for all this, as I have it from a book published some years ago in Norway, *The Letters of Ole Bull*, published by Alexander Bull, his son, with a biography by Jonas Lie. This circumstance brought Ole Bull into Mme. Malibran's circle; her talent moved him inexpressibly. He met her again later at Naples. When she died at Manchester he wa also in England, and wrote, thunderstruck, to his wife (a Frenchwoman, Mlle. Villeminot, whom he had married at Paris): "It seems impossible! A woman gifted with such warmth of soul, the intensest passion, such fire, and such oratory. I shall always remember how I sobbed at Bologna at her Desdemona. . . . She was so wonderfully like you. And now she is dead. . . . The thought of it is terrible. . . . But let's enjoy life. It's so short. Why disturb its course? It is not our doom. We shall live, travel and die together, Eh! my dear Félicie?"

Rome. My days were passed amid monuments, museums, palaces, ruins, and the streets : every evening I spent at the Villa Medici, the Academy of France, then directed by Horace Vernet. He incarnated in it dignity, his wife charity, and his daughter grace. Mlle. Louise Vernet seemed to fit into the Villa Medici as though into a natural frame. Her pure countenance like an ancient cameo, with some haunting poetical touch derived from one of Raphaël's virgins, she walked amid those lovely statues of antiquity or the Renascence, like one of them, a young Roman herself. I shall never forget my first glimpse of her. I was sitting alone in the Coliseum, on the lowest bench of the amphitheatre, with bent head, and, as Shakespeare says, with the eye of thought, marking out on the ground the track of departed generations. I raised my eyes, and beheld, at the very pinnacle of the circus, between two broken trees, and half merged with the sky, a young girl with glowing beauty, who began slowly descending the lower steps ; I thought it must be a Vestal priestess, coming to occupy the seats reserved for her devout sisters.

"Our evenings at the Villa Medici were spent in ever varied entertainment. Sometimes Mlle. Vernet would take her Basque

drum and dance the *saltarello* with her father, who might have been her brother. Sometimes Horace would go and look out Poussin's work and expound the meaning of it, the inwardness of his compositions which were always so rich in thought. . . . Sometimes improvised concerts would succeed these talks on art. What was my surprise and delight one evening, when I reached the Villa Medici, to find—well, who do you think? Mme. Malibran. I can still see the little homelike picture which I came upon that night. She was sitting at the side of the table and working. In front of her, and very near, but lower down, almost at her knees, was Mlle. Louise Vernet, on the top of a little tapestried hassock, and listening open-eyed. The lamp was throwing down an aureole of light, defined by the circular shade, on the two faces, one with its beauty in bloom, the other genius in all its glory; both visions of youth. My first surprise was followed by a hope which I whispered to Mlle. Vernet.

"'Don t count on too much,' she replied, 'she isn't going to sing; she is in one of her silent moods. For three evenings we haven't been able to get a note out of her. She comes here, all grace and smiles, sits down as you see,

takes up her tapestry, and gets as absorbed in a slipper as if it were a Mozart score: the great artist has become a little sempstress.'

"But, on the fourth day, conversation fell on Lord Byron, whom Mlle. Louise Vernet greatly admired. *Childe Harold* was fetched down off the shelves, and opened at Canto the Fourth, the canto dedicated to Rome; and, as we all understood English, we passed the evening in reading out loud, translating and reciting the finest stanzas: Mme. Malibran, brimful of fire, of broad-minded intelligence, interspersed her original remarks with our notes of admiration: yet she only uttered words; and, when the party broke up at one a.m., Horace said, with a laugh, 'Well, we must resign ourselves. The bird of Apollo is still a-wing.'

"Next day, we had all appointed a trysting-place at the Villa Panfili. The October afternoons in Rome are adorable, more scented and penetrating even than the spring mornings. Mme. Malibran arrived, still dream-wrapt. The course of our walk took us into a shady recess rounded off like a little circus of green. The ground was covered with fine grass; all around, tall parasol-like pines with arbutus-trees in between; at the bottom a spring and a fountain; the spring babbled into a little granite

basin ; the fountain was surmounted by a platform which one reached by eight or ten marble steps. The freshness of the water and the heat of the day wrought upon Mme. Malibran, who scampered up, like a child, to dip her head beneath the cascading water ; and, when she withdrew her head, her hair was all wet. The water had slackened the ribbons ; and, to dry them, she shook out on to her shoulders her dishevelled tresses, and the sun's rays, which pierced through the pines and the arbutus in golden shafts of light, made the little drops of water on her head sparkle like diamonds, like a cluster of stars. She glanced up, and perceived the platform above the fountain. What sudden idea crossed her mind? I do not know, but, all at once, her expression changed ; her laugh vanished, and gave place to a strange solemn look ; she moved one pace towards the ten marble steps, slowly climbed them, attained the height of the platform, whence she overlooked us all, and then turned to gaze on the sky and intoned the hymn to Diana in *Norma*, "*Casta Diva.*" Was it the suddenness, the uniqueness of the scene, the pleasure of hearing that voice, silent so long, in that place? Or she, was she first moved by appearing on that kind of pedestal? None can say ; but her tones,

sounding out under the dome of trees, mingling with the murmuring brook, the whispering air, the radiant hues of the garden, took on something grandiose, which thrilled our heart-strings; our eyes all filled with tears: in that posture, high above us, framed in by sky and foliage, she seemed to us a very goddess; when she came down, with that same look of grave serenity on her countenance, our first words of praise were tinged with a religious awe."

After those few weeks of rest at Rome, spent in a *far niente* very alien to her, Mme. Malibran left her good friends of the Villa Medici, and travelled to Brussels, where she stayed some time. There, I believe, she concluded a new engagement to sing in London, this time in English, at the Drury Lane Theatre, from May 1, 1833. But, before leaving Italy, she had promised to return to Naples: and there we shall find her again in the early months of this same year, 1833, "with more laurels, more admired and more admirable than ever," as one witness states whose experience and sincerity are unimpeachable.

CHAPTER VIII

New season at Naples with *La Sonnambula*—Engaged for Drury Lane to sing in English—Sings *La Sonnambula* in English, Bellini present—Marvellous triumph—Bellini's letter—Stays five months in London, and sings at provincial festivals—Leaves for Naples, and plays two new operas by Pacini and Coceia—Triumph in *Norma*—Bologna—First appearance at Scala (Milan)—Huge success—Sinigaglia—Lucca—Milan—Naples.

It was, I believe, in the middle of March, 1833, that Mme. Malibran arrived at Naples, and once more made her appearance before the public at the Fondo Theatre. This time she only remained in Naples a few weeks, but this sufficed to secure a magnificent triumph, due, especially, to her wonderful rendering of *La Sonnambula*, the first opera by Bellini in which she acted. It is curious that, whilst Bellini at Venice was staging his *Beatrice di Tenda*, she was playing in *La Sonnambula* at Naples, and the composer was called to London by an engagement, and left Italy without the opportunity of hearing the singer who was giving

his work such intensity of life and richness of dramatic colour. But, stranger still, two months later, he was going to see her play this same opera in London in an English version, on an English stage, just after performing it in Italian, in an Italian theatre, amid frantic applause. We shall see how great was the impression she made on him.

In fact, Mme. Malibran's achievement at Naples in the pleasant part of Amina was perfect, both as acting and as singing: our witness to vouch for the fact is Bellini's dearest and most intimate friend, Francesco Florimo, his old fellow-student at the conservatoire of San Pietro a Majella, who devoted himself to Bellini's memory, and, for the whole of his long life, never ceased to aim at eternizing him. In the book dedicated to his friend, *Bellini, memorie e lettere*, Florimo records his recollection of Mme. Malibran in *La Sonnambula*, and expresses his wonder at her interpretation of this part, which the singer, Mme. Pasta, a great artist, had already impressed with her personality as well:—

"Maria Malibran has interpreted *La Sonnambula* divinely, identified herself so completely with the unsophisticated and simple

character of the shepherdess Amina, that her version of the tender feelings which agitate her was on the stage a perfect and exquisitely true expression, owing to a voice full of the purest passion. She might be said to have been a second creator of the rôle, and I remember when she played it at the Fondo in Naples, in the spring of 1833, what a deep impression she made, and how doubts were raised whether the honour of the triumph was to be credited to Bellini, the author of the grand idyll, or the extraordinary artist who had rendered it so well. The fervour of the audience was beyond words when this inspired singer was singing those sweet and soft words: *Come per me sereno—Sopra il sen la man mi posa—Ah, vorrei trovar parola—Di un pensiero, di un accento—Non è questa, ingrato core*, etc., etc. But the climax of the work, in which, possessed by her guiding genius, she showed her superiority over all of her fellows, was the last scene, which, from the *récitatif* to the end, was a real creation, and brought out the nobility and serenity of Bellini's music in all its splendour. The famous Crescentini (the last to hold the sceptre of our famous school of song, which died with him) said, after hearing and extolling Mme. Malibran in this opera, that the singers

of the past, Farinelli, Gizzielli, Caffarelli, Marchesi, Velluti, Mmes. Conti, Pasquali, Gabrielli, and he himself might have sung the *audante* of the scene *Ah non credea mirarti* as well as she, but not better; whereas in the *allegro* which follows it (Crescentini goes on to say), not one of the celebrities of the past could have performed it with more feeling, more intense passion, especially in the phrase *Ah m' abbraccia*, where she rose beyond comparison and carried her hearers to the highest pitch of enthusiasm."

One may readily imagine what would be Mme. Malibran's success in so perfect an interpretation of a characteristic opera like this. But more inconceivable is the fact that she showed the same mastery when singing the same part in English, in another language, which might be deemed less harmonious, less musical; and, even then, aroused the enthusiasm and admiration not only of the public, but of the composer himself, who was stirred to the depths of his soul and carried away by the pathetic tones and beauty of execution, such as his wildest dreams never dreamed of.

Mme. Malibran was engaged for the London season by the Drury Lane Theatre, which was

going to perform English opera, *i. e.* opera in English. *La Sonnambula* had been translated for her expressly: this play was making the tour of Europe, had been inaugurated at Milan on March 6, 1831, played in Italian at the King's Theatre on July 28, 1831, and in Paris on October 28, 1831. In this opera Mme. Malibran wished to appear in this new guise before the English public; and, in the rôle of the simple-minded maiden Amina, she came before the audience at Drury Lane on May 1, 1833. To give some idea of her triumph, I need only quote the impression she made on Bellini himself, who had never seen her before, and I translate this interesting part of a long letter to his friend Florimo:—

"The day after my arrival in the great country of grey skies (called leaden and not inaptly), I saw on the placards (which are here carried about the streets) an announcement of *La Sonnambula* in English, with Maria Malibran in the title-rôle. Anxious not to miss hearing and appreciating the *diva*, who fills the musical world—I did not know her save by reputation—I hastened to go to the theatre, especially as I was invited by one of the greatest ladies in the English aristocracy, the Duchess of Hamilton

(who herself sings exquisitely, having been a pupil of our Crescentini, who gave me a letter of introduction to her, as you know). Words fail me, my dear Florimo, to tell you how my poor music was murdered and hacked about, or—as the Neapolitans say—*scorticato* [flayed alive], by these . . . English, and when, too, it was sung in the language which some one, I've forgotten who, calls the language of birds and parrots; I do not understand a syllable of it. But it was only when Mme. Malibran sang that I recognized *La Sonnambula.* And in the *allegro* of the last scene, especially at the words *Ah m' abbraccia*, she put so much force, it made the words tell with such truth, that I was startled at first, and then felt so great pleasure, that, regardless of my being in an English theatre, and forgetting social customs, and my duties to the lady to whom I sat next in her own box, and at last putting aside the modesty (which every author shows even if he do not feel it), I was the first to start clapping my hands and to cry out loud, 'Viva! Viva! Brava! Brava!' This southern and rather volcanic outburst was a novelty in the *chilly, calculating and impassive* country, and surprised and aroused the curiosity of the fair sons of Albion, who began asking who the outrageous

fellow was making such a disturbance. But instantly after—I don't know how—having discovered I was the composer of *La Sonnambula*, they gave me such an ovation, which discretion obliges me to gloss over even with you. Not enough that they should applaud me frantically—I couldn't tell you how often—whilst I thanked them from my box; at all costs they must see me on the stage, where I was almost dragged by a throng of young noblemen, who were all admirers for my music; I unfortunately don't know who. Amongst them was the son of the Duchess of Hamilton, the Marquess of Douglas, a young man who has a soul full of all of the poetry of Scotland and a heart filled with the Neapolitan fire. The first person to meet me was Mme. Malibran, who threw her arms round my neck, and with indescribable delight sang only my four notes in *Ah m' abbraccia* and said nothing more. My emotion was at its height: I thought I was in Paradise, I was struck dumb, and recollect no more. The renewed stamping and clapping of the English audience, who become furious once they warm up, called us before the footlights; we stood there, holding each other by the hand: imagine the rest. . . . All that I can say is that I do not know if I shall ever

again experience a more moving scene. Since then I have made friends with Mme. Malibran; she has told me how much she admires my music, and I know I appreciate her enormous talent; and I have promised to write her an opera suitable for her personality. This idea is exciting me, my dear Florimo. Good-bye. . . ."

If Madame Malibran, singing *La Sonnambula* in English, could move the author of this delightful work to such warm terms, what must have been the effect on the English hearers, who felt particularly flattered at seeing her show her matchless talents in English? As a fact, she was all the rage during this Drury Lane season; she restored the fortunes of the house, which the public had been neglecting for some time, and gave it a new lease of favour to which it had long been a stranger. It is worth while mentioning some details I find in some correspondence from the composer, Georges Cottrau, from London to an Italian paper, *Omnibus et omnium*, published at Naples; these exact details are the more interesting, as, up to now, nothing was known of this detail in Mme. Malibran's career:—

"The poor director of the Drury Lane Theatre was at his last gasp, and saw that English

patriotism would not be kindled at his call: so he made one last effort; he recollected that Mme. Malibran some five or six years back had commenced her career in the so-called English opera at New York; and, one fine day, last summer, he sent off Chelard, the musical director of his theatre, to Naples, to engage this wonder-working vocalist, who can sing with equal ease in French, German, Spanish, and even Neapolitan, and to get her to sing in English.[1]

"Maestro Chelard's mission was very delicate; he had to entice this enchanting singer away from Italy, the home of art, so worthy to be her audience; just when her first appearance at Naples had aroused from its slumbers a great enthusiasm; to cajole her away to waste her talent on a second-rate theatre which was not in good odour, as we have seen, for its scenery, for the ugliness of the language, the poor acting, and the audience it drew. . . . But the *ultima ratio* of artists, the *argomento irresist-*

[1] Grand prize of Rome, 1811. Chelard was a distinguished artist, but made little headway in France, where he produced at the Opéra—Macbeth, the libretto of which was written by Rouget de Lisle; and, at the Opéra Comique, a little piece called *La Table et le Logement.* He spent most of his life abroad, in Italy, England, Germany, writing various plays for each of these countries, and became master in the chapel of the Grand Duke of Weimar, where he died on February 12, 1861.

ibile, as Don Basilio has it, proved potent; and, in return for huge fees (£2,000 for fifteen performances, and a benefit), the ungrateful muse was seduced away; fortunately for the negotiator, the Neapolitans were only told of it after his departure, or they would have stoned him. Perhaps, we must hastily add to save Mme. Malibran's honour, the very difficulty of the task in accepting such an engagement tickled her pride. If so, a noble self-confidence was crowned with the greatest success.

"In fact, her appearance in Bellini's *Sonnambula* (translated into English at her request without any alteration whatsoever) was greeted with a welcome so frantic, such as was never known in the annals of the theatre; the house was crowded to suffocation; and, for such an attractive novelty, the highest society folk were present.

"Those who have seen Mme. Malibran in *La Gazza Ladra* (as probably all of my readers have) can imagine what she gets out of first scenes of ingenuous coquetry, which occasions Elvino's jealousy: but of one thing, imagination can only afford a feeble foretaste, viz. of the modest and luxurious charm she cast round the poetical part of this character, the other world disclosed by somnambulism to this shy little village-girl, who is then set free to enjoy all the mad joy of a

love consecrated at the foot of the altar. Never as the English papers say, has the distracting influence, which is inseparable from a large gathering, been so obliterated by such a magic spell; the marvellous silence all over the house, interrupted at first only by thunderous cheers, the repetition of which was repressed only for fear of losing one note of the singing, and, later on, by half-strangled sobs, stamping for enthusiasm, and exclamations of ecstasy.

"This unprecedented success was all the finer, for Mme. Malibran was singing in a foreign language, and before an audience very susceptible in this matter; the hindrance was for her only a stepping-stone to greater powers. The English press is inexhaustible on the perfect ease and the supreme diction which, without any false accents, sounds every syllable; whilst English singers, in consequence of their swallowing the vowels, end by regarding clearness of pronunciation as incompatible with the genius of the language.

"The vogue of *La Sonnambula* has been so great, and the receipts so heavy, that Mme. Malibran has only sung occasionally in a few other operas: in the *Devil's Bridge* (a sort of rhapsody of popular songs and ditties), in which her complacency was rewarded with frantic

applause ;[1] and an opera, *The Students of Jena* written for her by Chelard. This last opera, owing to its good choruses, and its hotchpotch of national melodies from all countries, went off very well, for Mme. Malibran, a cosmopolitan and polyglot artist, sang them deliciously."[2]

But the correspondent of the Italian paper was wrong regarding the amount of Mme. Malibran's fee. She received £2,000, not for fifteen performances, but for the two months of May and June, during which she was to play three times a week. This will be shown. And she had some differences with her manager, Alfred Bunn, which were soon smoothed over : these are shown by the letter she sent to Bunn, a few days after her first night's triumph :—

"St. James' Street,
"*6th May*, 1833.

"My dear Mr. Bunn,—

"Allow me to continue my correspondence with you in French. I explain myself more

[1] The composer was the famous Irishman, William Balfe, the writer of so many works meant for England (amongst others, *The Bohemian Girl*), for Italy, and for France, which is indebted to him for two comic operas, *Le Puits d'amour* and *Les Quatre fils Aymon*.

[2] This opera was performed on June 4 : it had been played in Germany, and Cottrau is wrong in saying it was written for Mme. Malibran.

clearly, perhaps, in this language. In reply to what you tell me relative to the rights, which, according to you, I do not possess, to sing in any concert given in the locality of a theatre, I say that all the judges on the earth, whether English, French, Turks, or Chinese, will tell you that I have, in accordance with my engagement, the right to sing in any or all concert-halls—rooms devoted to concerts—no matter in what locality they may be situated or built. But this is not a question either of rights or of judges. I reply to you, in this fashion, only to make you believe, my dear director, that if you had a hundred thousand devils in your body, you would never be a match for Spanish brains. I prefer, therefore, your second alternative; it will, at least, prove to you that my interests are for me the least consideration, and that I desire nothing so much as to preserve between us those friendly relations which have hitherto subsisted. I propose, therefore, to give, during the month of May, one extra representation beyond those named in my agreement, for the benefit of the management of Drury Lane, on the express condition that you will put no obstacle—not the slightest obstacle—to any kind of concerts that may be offered me. Now, there I stop.

"I declare to you that this is for the *first time in my life !!!* and I take some credit to myself, because I think you are a little hard on me.

"M.-F. MALIBRAN."[1]

But this was not all of Mme. Malibran's correspondence with her manager. There follows another letter in which she states her dislike of an opera Bunn wished her to play, and mentions another opera by Chelard, which she did want to sing in :—

[1] The translations of the letters are taken from *Templeton and Malibran, Reminiscences of these renowned Singers, with original Letters and Anecdotes* (London 1881). [The originals could not be traced by M. Pougin.] Templeton was the tenor who supported Mme. Malibran in her several performances of English opera in London. He died in London in July, 1886.

Matters were arranged satisfactorily; this is proved by the fact that Mme. Malibran's articles were thus amended for the month of June :—

"Madam Malibran is hereby engaged to perform at either the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, or Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, for the month of June, to perform three times per week for the sum of £1,000 sterling on the conditions of her previous engagements, except that she is at liberty to sing at all the concerts, provided they do not interfere with the performances or rehearsals of the said theatres, and Monsieur de Bériot is also to have a concert at one of the said theatres, and is to be entitled to two-thirds of the receipts of the evening. "M.-F. MALIBRAN.

"LONDON, 24*th May*, 1833."

"10*th* *May*.[1]

"My dear Sir,—

"I cannot give you a decision at once. I must see the rôle to know if it suits me. I must also have the piece. I am only sorry that you propose another thing instead of the piece of Chelard, which I know *almost by heart*, which is an immense advantage for promptitude in acting. I know my subject, and am enchanted with it. Whilst, as to the other, I don't know it at all, either music or words. There is yet one thing to recall to your memory. When I set out for London, without receiving the remittance of Mr. Rothchild, then I expected to receive in London the first payment on the 2nd May, as is stipulated in my agreement. That condition has not been fulfilled. I attribute the omission to the immense occupations the theatre causes you: nevertheless, I am not provided with the necessary funds to wait longer. I beg you to dispatch to me, as quickly as possible, a draft on the banker with whom the first *deposit of £1,000* has been made.

"Believe, my dear Mr. Bunn, that there is no ill-temper on my part, still less want of confidence, but truly a distress in the purse.

[1] Translation as before from *Templeton and Malibran*.

There is a complete fall in the *public funds* of my purse. . . . Oh, Captain Poulihil! Oh, Providence of those poor *chanters of music!* Come to my assistance, without which I cannot be your very humble and very obedient servant, any more than can the poor Amina, who says to you, with clasped hands, 'Ah, for pity's sake, ah, let me not awake . . . until the little bag is quite filled up with . . .'

"You know it will be your turn next.

"MARIA.

"I request the *favour* of an *answer* about Chelard's opera."

The work Bunn suggested did not suit her so we learn from another letter; and she declined absolutely this time.

"My dear Mr. Bunn,—

"Immediately, after writing to you, I sat down to the piano to try over the score which you sent me. I am very sorry to be obliged to tell you that this part does not please me at all, and, as to the musique, I shall never sing it, it is quite in a different style from mine; and, consequently, does not suit me in any way. I, therefore, return you the score, and beg you will not mention it to me again.

"Here, again, is my *reply* positive and negative.

"Be pleased, therefore, when you have an opera to submit to me,—be pleased, I say, to choose something which will suit me, and which is within my capabilities, not beyond the limits of the little power I possess.

"With many compliments, in haste,

"MALIBRAN."

Finally, in a letter to Bunn, she re-insists on Chelard's operas, and finally induces him to stage it. [This letter is in her own English]:—

"ST. JAMES STREET, *Mardi.*

"Again and again, alwais me, and eternally me, my dear Mister Bunn, I have been tormenting Poor Chelard out of his wits. I want to have my part to practise it, know it, and be able to play in 10 days the latest. I am sure if you give proper orders for the copy of the parts, *we* shall be all ready, at least *I* will be ready in 8 days . . . but . . . rehearsals, parts, rehearsals, parts, orders, rehearsals, no rehearsals without parts, no parts without orders, and no orders without my eternal hints, and my never-ending letters, since it appears you will not do me the high honour of comming at my house for a quarter

of an hour to have a little settling chit-chat. However it may be, I wait your pleasure, noble cousin, and humbly beg for an answer when it may suit your Majesty. Nonsense apart, pray say *yes* or *no*, for it would be too late to give orders for the copies in a few days.

"Believe me,

"Yours, etc., etc.,

"MARIA M——"

To return to her success. This was so great that she remained five whole months in England. Some weeks later, she migrated from Drury Lane to Covent Garden, of which Bunn was also manager; there the English operatic productions were continued. According to the *Revue musicale* of July 20, 1833: "The Covent Garden Opera will remain open all of this year. The performances will be restricted to opera and spectacular pieces. Mme. Malibran has now recovered completely from a slight indisposition which had compelled her to break off her representations, and in *La Sonnambula* has shown herself in possession of all of her dramatic resources." After the conclusion of her engagements she went to take part in the 110th Festival of the Choral Association of Gloucester, Hereford and Wor-

cester, that year being held at Worcester on the 24th, 25th, 26th and 27th of September (1833). It was a gigantic festival, and, amongst other works, Haydn's *Creation*, Sigismond Neukomm's *Mount Sinaï*, Spohr's *Last Judgment* and Schneider's *Deluge* were played. Cramer acted as conductor, and the soloists were Maria Malibran, Clara Novello, Donzelli, Knyvett, Braham, Ed. Taylor, Vaughan and Phillips.[1]

In November Mme. Malibran was due to return to Italy. Of course she stayed some few days in Paris on the way. She was there late in October, for on October 24 she was a spectator at the Théâtre Italien, when Giulia Grisi, then in the flower of her beauty and the talent of her youth, was for the first time playing Ninetta in *La Gazza Ladra*, a rôle which had been one of her greatest triumphs.[2] In the first week of November she set out for Naples; and Gaetano Barbieri, one of her

[1] An English trade journal, the *Music Trade Review*, quite recently said, speaking of Mme. Malibran: "The expression which she put into her singing of sacred music made her an object of competition in all our periodical festivals; and, any time her presence could be secured, she was received as the great attraction in such circumstances."

[2] The *Revue musicale* of October 26 contains an interesting notice on this performance and Mme. Malibran's presence at the Théâtre Italien.

Italian biographers (*Notizie biografiche di M. F. Malibran*, Milan, Stella, 1836–8°), thus records her passing through Bologna on the road to Naples: "In the beginning of November she was one of the spectators at the Communal Theatre of Bologna, where, as soon as she was recognized by the occupants of the pit and boxes, she received as great an ovation, salutations and applause as she had when singing on that same stage one year before. She showed her gratitude for being thus remembered by giving a concert on the night of the 5th (together with Donzelli and Inchindi) at the Società del Casino."

I think it was on November 14 that Mme. Malibran performed in *Otello*, *La Gazza Ladra* and *Semiramide* at Naples. As soon as she arrived, a new opera, *Irene o l'Assedio di Messina*, was being rehearsed, in which she was to have the title-rôle. The music was by Pacini—an over-prolific writer, and an old friend of Rossini. On November 28 *Irene* was produced at the San Carlo, and the piece was so feeble that it proved an utter failure, though acted by Mme. Malibran, who was supported by David, Reina, Lablache, Ambrogi, Benedetti, and a young musician, Garcia-Ruiz, whom, I imagine, was her cousin, of whom her father's

letter informs us.[1] Pacini, however disappointing the reception turned out to be, felt very grateful to Mme. Malibran for coming to his help, and in his *Le mie memorie artistiche* (di Giovanni Pacini, Firenze, Guidi, 1865, 8vo), rendered her a due allegiance. Though the few lines he devotes to her in connection with his *Irene* do not apprise us of anything very new, it is not out of place to quote them here :—

"Maria Malibran, that unique genius, sustained the protagonist's part, and astonished both the composer and the public. This sublimely gifted woman was such a mass of talent, and made so great an impression on me when I heard her for the first time in *La Gazza Ladra*, that I had to be hauled away from the hall of the San Carlo, as I, in my box, was giving another spectacle myself! Never—and I am telling the truth—have I felt such emotion when listening to any other singer. In all she did she was extraordinary. Affable in character beyond words: making no distinction between rich and poor, noble and plebeian; speaking five languages fluently, Spanish, Italian, English, French and German; well

[1] *Vide* p. 114.

read in history and literature, a good draughtsman and painter, in fact all that could be desired in a cultured lady. There was a rumour that she led an irregular life and drank at meals ;[1] but I who had the privilege of living over six months with this celebrated lady (as I was staying at the Palazzo Batbaia), and had my food at the same table, can affirm that this is utterly untrue, however much slanderous tongues may assert. Her usual fare was very simple : every night, after singing, she would have a glass of champagne, which does not to me seem to make her out unsober. She was almost an amazon ; rode on horseback with skill and neatness of which the finest cavalry officer need not have been ashamed ; and fenced as well as any trained soldier : in all she did she was a genius. The reader will excuse me for spending so much time in teliing of so great a character, of whom it may justly be said : *La feo natura e poi ruppe il modello.*"

Not only did she, during the Neapolitan season, run through her old repertory with all of her wonted success, but Mme. Malibran also

[1] This is a slander which some fools, more out of crassness than grossness, tried to spread abroad, and, needless to say, was shattered against the evidence of all those who knew the famous artist.

Madame Malebranche
From a Painting by Prudhon

played in the performance of another new opera by Carlo Coccia, *La Figlia dell' arciere*, a musician as fecund and almost as tedious as Pacini. This time, in spite of her share in it, it was an utter fiasco; and *La Figlia dell' arciere*, which was played on January 19, 1834, soon sank into oblivion owing to public indifference. Probably during this season she for the first time at the San Carlo took a part in one of Bellini's works, which had great vogue just then, *I Capuleti ed i Montecchi*: her performance renewed her accustomed triumphs. A striking incident is attached to her rendering of this work.

This opera of Bellini's was hardly born before it was handled in a manner one can only at the best call strange, and, from the point of view of art, barbarous. Some years before, Vaccaj had written another opera on the same theme, *Giulietta e Romeo*. Certain *prime donne* then had an idea, which was rather bold, of merging them; as they thought Bellini's score better than Vaccaj's except in the last act, where they preferred Vaccaj, they proposed to make up a hotchpotch *Romeo and Juliet* out of Acts I–III of Bellini, and Act IV of Vaccaj. Such was the regard in those bygone days for the rights of the hapless and defenceless authors! Mme.

Malibran found it was an established custom, solemnly ratified, so to speak, and made the mistake of conforming with it ; and this was the version of *I Capuleti ed i Montecchi* by Bellini in which she played. Now, Felice Romani, Bellini's loyal collaborator, was the writer of the libretto, and rightly galled by such an outrage on his friend, he published some witty jeers at Mme. Malibran. For Romani was no mere librettist ; he was a distinguished writer and fine scholar, a real poet whose *Lyrics* had won a just meed of praise ; also a critic with plenty of acumen, and some forcibleness, which was well known and appreciated by the readers of the *Gazzetta Piemontese.* In this paper, at last, his patience gave way after two years' repression ; he wrote an article on Mme. Malibran, and reproved her for certain alterations she had introduced into the composer's music, especially for the liberties she took with Bellini's opera.[1] The article was cast in a fantastic vein of mordant humour, and this is the pertinent passage :—

" This work (*I Capuleti ed i Montecchi*), a short time ago, made a tour round the Old World, and the New World, was heralded by the

[1] *Gazzetta Piemontese*, January 18, 1836.

greatest celebrities in the sphere of art, and wherever it made obeisance in front of the footlights, it delighted the audience, albeit that two friends, Signor Capriccio and Mme. Malibran, embroidered the work of the poet and the musician and made it almost irrecognisable.

"Mme. Malibran would suggest one course, and Signor Capriccio bowed his assent; Signor Capriccio humbly put forward an idea, and Mme. Malibran approved it; and what with Mme. Malibran curtseying to her partner, and him responding gracefully, they both worked together so well, and were so well attuned to each other, that out of all of their devices, experiments, and their machinations, a stew, or a condiment, or a fricassee was turned out which was beautiful to behold. Potage à la Celli, jelly à la Pacini, claret à la Ricci, and carrots à la Rossi; all tastes were satisfied with a little of everything.[2] To make the assortment perfect, the third act of Vaccaj was suddenly substituted for the fourth of Bellini.

"And Mme. Malibran, with Circe's fascination and magic and strength, stood up on the

[2] Filippo Celli, Giovanni Pacini, Luigi Ricci, and Lauro Rossi, four composers of this epoch, whose style Romani does not appear, according to this extract, to appreciate highly.

stage to serve this *olla podrida;* and whilst Signor Capriccio offered morsels of it to the nobles in the boxes and the groundlings below, Reason fled distraught from her forsaken haunts; and the audience, stricken and left witless, were the obedient subjects of Signor Capriccio, drank of his wine, and tasted his *farrago;* and they were dazed—and became as the comrades of Odysseus."

But, however she erred in this respect, Mme. Malibran's success at Naples in *I Capuleti ed i Montecchi* kept up to its vast proportions in *La Sonnambula*, and was most conspicuous perhaps in *Norma*, which she was performing for the first time at the San Carlo. Guillaume Cottrau, the composer, states in a letter, dated March 4, 1834, to his brother, who was then living in Paris: "Tell Bellini Mme. Malibran has been colossally successful in *Norma*. She is engaged here for forty performances, from November to February next, for a fee of £3,200 and benefits. What do you think of it? Fabulous almost. Marietta is leaving in eight days' time." Ten days later, on March 14, 1834, he writes to his brother again: "Mme. Malibran is charming in *La Sonnambula;* but her final achievement

is in *Norma*, where the enthusiasm aroused is incredible. Try to imagine, that, at her last performance, the day before yesterday (she left yesterday for Bologna), after being *frantically* applauded in all her songs, she was *chiamata fuori* [recalled] ten times in the last piece, by a fanatical crowd of admirers. She is engaged from November 10 to March 3 next for forty-five performances at £80 a-piece."[1]

In connection with this triumph, Bellini, who was then at Paris and had been apprised of it directly by his friend Florimo, and was then engaged in writing a new opera for the Theâtre Italien, wrote to his friend on March 11: "What you tell me of Mme. Malibran's great hit in *Norma* gives me intense pleasure. I think as you do, that as she is engaged for the Carnival, it would be better to write my opera for Naples in January rather than later. But how am I to find my librettos, my dear Florimo? I am at a loss as regards my Paris opera: I cannot light on a subject which would be adapted to the company here. I cannot possibly accept the invitation for two such important places as Paris and Naples at once, and produce two new operas which would come up to what

[1] Vide *Le portefeuille d'un mélomane; Revue Britannique*, July 1887.

both would expect of me. You are right in saying that securing Mme. Malibran in advance is a pledge of success; but do you know if I wrote in May, I might get Rubini, Tamburini and Mme. Ronzi? For the London House is always uncertain, and if it does not pay this year, Naples might engage Rubini and Tamburini from May to September, and then I should have those two singers, with Mme. Ronzi or some other as good, and should have time to find a subject and write the music."[1]

The reader will recollect that at that touching meeting of theirs in London[2] Bellini had promised Mme. Malibran to write an opera expressly for her. He meant the offer in all sincerity, and the proof of this is to be seen in this letter, as we shall see later on. Meanwhile, to follow the course of the wanderings of the enchantress, as Romani termed her.

The day after her last performance at Naples, on March 13, she left that city and proceeded to Bologna, where she had contracted for a few representations, before going on to act for the first time at Milan, the real musical capital of Italy, where she was impatiently awaited. On March 31 she reappeared at Bologna in *Otello*,

[1] Francesco Florimo, *Bellini, memorie e lettere.*

[2] *Vide* p. 153.

La Sonnambula and *Norma*, and the enthusiasm was indescribable. According to an Italian writer: "To vary our expressions, we might say that Mme. Malibran's singing not only delighted the population, but enriched them, as she drew within the walls of Bologna so many strangers from the neighbouring cities and countries that the innkeepers had to give up their own beds."

After her short engagement at Bologna, she left for Milan, where she had promised six performances at the Scala Theatre. Despite the memories of Mme. Pasta in *Norma*, who had had a brilliant success in this theatre, she did not hesitate from starting off with this rôle on May 15: and her triumph was so great that she performed it anew two days later, on the 17th; on the 20th she played *Otello;* on her fourth day she did *Norma* once again; on the fifth *Otello;* and on the sixth and last (on the 24th) *Norma.*

"These were real gala-days for the Milanese. Who could describe the processions that escorted Mme. Malibran home from the theatre, the wild rush to see her off the stage, the serenades with which she was regaled! Every man's spirit was stirred on such an occasion, but the enthusiasm

which meant most for the eternal glory of the great singer and the writer was that of the author of the libretto of *Norma*. Felice Romani's song *Di queste a te percosse* will live as immemorially associated with Maria Malibran's name as '*Chiare fresche dolci acque*' with that of Laura."[1]

At this stage, Mme. Malibran's life was one stupendous rush and whirl. Her presence literally astounded the whole of musical Italy, which had no thoughts, save for her, and no wish but to hear, admire and acclaim her. She was invited, or even summoned, to all parts at once; twenty cities offered her engagements all at the same time; and those to which she went were the more keen in their wish to have her once again than those others to which she had not already gone, in their longing to come to know her. She could not comply with all these demands on her, all the requests and implorings, for the simple reason that she was not a bird and could not be in two places at once, but she signed a number of contracts with

[1] Gaetano Barbieri, *Notizie biografiche di M. F. Malibran.* The same biographer also said of her: "To sing, amaze and vanquish all hearts; and leave the audience inconsolable at her absence—this is what always happened, as the understood thing on all of Maria Malibran's musical progresses or seasons."

several of those cities the dates of which were so close as to leave only time enough to cover the ground between them. Thus, we shall see her flit along all the roads of Italy in turn, going to Sinigaglia for the fair (one of the most important in the Peninsula and held in July), thence go and spend part of August and September in Lucca, travel back to Milan, and stay there until the end of October, and, at last, return to Naples for the grand winter season. The prospect never alarmed her, and we shall see how she made ready for this exhibition of galloping energy. Tireless as ever, always eager to be of service, she calmly set out for England after her first performances at Milan, with no other object except to sing in London in one concert given by her brother. And as she was to be back in Sinigaglia in the early days of July, from sheer lightness of heart, at a time when railways were non-existent, and journeys were very much more tiring and tedious than they are now, did an eight hundred leagues' distance there and back, to benefit and please her brother.

In this journey she stopped for an instant only, for she had to count every minute, at Paris and at Brussels ; and, at the hour stated, the day assigned, she was back in Italy at

Sinigaglia, and there played, to a chorus of cheers and plaudits, *La Sonnambula*, *I Capuleti ed i Montecchi* and the *Barber of Seville*. On August 17 she for the first time acted in *La Sonnambula* at Lucca, then *I Capuleti ed i Montecchi* and then *Norma*. At Lucca, she stirred the people almost to madness, as a letter of de Bériot attests. He always accompanied her. He tells us that the enthusiasm at Lucca was so great that, every evening, after the spectacle, massed throngs escorted the great artist's carriage to her hotel, huzzaing, cheering and hurrahing. "Yesterday (September 7)," he says, "was her benefit: she selected *Otello*: the house was one huge garden of laurels and flowers, and this time she had a torchlight procession." On September 27 she was back again at Milan, acting in *Norma*, supported, as before, by Mme. Garcia-Ruiz as Adalgisa (I persist in believing she was her cousin).[1] She stayed one whole month in Milan, watching all her former triumphs being born anew, maybe, with even greater vehemence and brilliancy than at her first performances in that city: she acted in *La Sonnambula*, *I Capuleti ed i Montecchi* and *Otello*; on October 26 she gave her farewell representation, *La Sonnambula*, and had an

[1] *Vide* p. 114.

ovation literally unimaginable. Lastly, in the first week of November, after traversing Italy in all its length and breadth, she arrived once again at Naples, where the season for which she was engaged commenced on November 10 and lasted until March 3, 1835.[1]

[1] Countess Merlin's book gives dates for all of these journeys, the preciseness of which would deceive a reader: they are mostly quite unreliable. Those for which I state exact figures I have verified sometimes from the correspondence columns of certain French papers; mostly from contemporary Italian documents of unimpeachable authority.

CHAPTER IX

At Naples has Duprez to support her—Increasing triumphs—Bellini eager to write several operas for her—Correspondence on this subject—No outcome—Plays two new operas by Rossi and Persiani—Does not do well as dancer—Letter of de Bériot—Serious accident; breaks her arm—Sings *La Sonnambula* with arm in a sling—Leaves for Venice, indescribable success—Another proof of generosity—The Teatro Malibran.

LONG before Mme. Malibran's return to Naples, she was the talk of that town, not only amongst the public, but musicians as well, and any who near by or from afar were attracted by the splendour and brilliance of the two great Neapolitan theatres. There were fond expectations of seeing her play one or two new works, in the course of the season, in which her marvellous talents might reveal themselves under special conditions, more strikingly, even, for the audience, than in hackneyed and familiar operas. A letter from Bellini has already shown that negotiations were proceeding between him and the management of the San Carlo Theatre; but these were dragged out and resulted in nothing positive. But, previously even, ap-

plication had been made to other composers, such as would hardly have been expected to figure in the matter; and all of this was unknown until now. Some time after August 2, *i. e.* whilst Mme. Malibran was at Sinigaglia, Guillaume Cottrau, writing to his brother at Paris, says: "The Société des Théâtres has requested me to send out feelers to Auber to get him to write an opera this winter for Mme. Malibran. We are also expecting a reply from Meyerbeer; if you chance to see him, give him a reminder; you can always appeal to his vanity. You may imagine how keen I feel about celebrated composers writing for our stage." Auber, at this time, was too much taken up with the Opéra, and the Opéra Comique, where he produced a new work every year, to be able to accept this invitation, even supposing it attracted him. Meyerbeer, for his part, was engrossed in his French career, and then working at the *Huguenots*, and was never the kind of man to be drawn off his scent by a red herring. Matters were at a standstill on their part, and the management next thought of Bellini, or even Donizetti. On September 18, Cottrau was again writing to his brother. "We are now starting on a fresh tack altogether, and are trying to induce Donizetti to turn out a

new opera for Mme. Malibran; whilst every instant should bring us a reply from Bellini. Without those two composers, our theatres would go to the deuce . . ."

Meanwhile, Mme. Malibran signalized her return to the Fondo Theatre, on November 11, with *La Sonnambula.* This season the tenor for the two royal theatres of Naples was none other than the great French singer, Duprez, who was supporting Mme. Malibran, and, for the first time, playing Elvino with her; Mme. Duprez was also in the company, and, on November 19, at the San Carlo, played in *Tancredi* with Mme. Malibran; and, on December 4, *Norma* was once again acted there, with her in the title-rôle, Mme. Duprez as Adalgisa, and Duprez as Pollione.[1]

This season renewed all of her former triumphs; and Guillaume Cottrau, writing to his brother on November 20, says: "I am sending you an unpublished *rondo* written by Pacini for Mme. Malibran, which she will

[1] This season lasted about four months. The *Almanacco dei reali teatri San Carlo e Fondo dell' annata teatrale 1834* (Naples, 1835, 12mo) informs us that Mme. Malibran received 19020·95 ducats, a little over £3,200. Duprez, who was engaged for seven full months, first from July 1 to 28, then from October 10, 1834 to April 11, 1835, received 4829·96 ducats, about £821; his wife, for the same time and terms, 2488·78 ducats, *i. e.* £463.

interpolate to-morrow in *Tancredi*. Yes, our dear Marietta has had a tremendous reception at her return. She has really improved in every respect. Tell Bellini she is awaiting an opera by him; but she is afraid that a part written for Mlle. Grisi would not suit her. To satisfy her, he might at least garnish up a *cavatina*. She would be so delighted."

At his instance—whilst the ordinary repertory was continued on both stages—terms for negotiations were being bandied between Bellini and the management; but the several months of correspondence produced no result. At first Bellini demanded four thousand ducats to write a new opera; then, when he was asked for three instead of one, he fixed his fee at ten thousand ducats, for which he sold all his rights in these works, in which it was understood that Mme. Malibran should have the principal woman's part. In a letter sent in July 1834 to one Lanari, the agent and representative of the society that managed the two theatres, he set out his conditions in detail:—

"1. In the beginning of February I will hand in ready for the stage the first opera I write for Mme. Malibran, Duprez, Porto, and for all the actors engaged at the Royal Theatres,

which the composition will require. I could not deliver the work any sooner, because of the time that the journey will take; also because I must write the opera I have promised at Paris; but as I have finished the first act of it, I hope to get through it by the middle of September, and then to start at once on the Naples opera. If the Management should wish to stage it in November, I would leave for Naples at once; and, if possible, produce my opera there before February: *but under no conditions at a gala performance*, for this is more killing than cholera for the musical effect.

"2. If the Society continue to manage the theatres, I will hand in the second opera in January, 1836, and the third in January, 1837; but, if the contract of the Society with the Government should come to an end at the Carnival of 1836, I would then give the second in July, 1835, and the third in January, 1836. Our agreement will thus be complied with and three operas written, but I could not do it at the same figure.

"3. I will be at Naples one month previous to the production of the first opera, six weeks before the second and third, to assist at the rehearsals.

"4. I will take on myself the finding of the

libretti; the management is to pay me forty pounds for each one—the price which Romani exacts and the Italian Theatre in Paris pays Pepoli: if it is less, the Society shall have the advantage of it; I will keep the Society informed of the selection of the poet and the subject, and I shall always avoid ending tragically. Thus we shall keep on the best of terms.

"5. The ownership of the three operas shall be ceded by me to the Society. I am not to be obliged to play the accompaniments during the first three productions.

"6. The Society, for their part, shall pay me ten thousand ducats in six equal portions, the first when I reach Naples, the second after the rehearsals. Similarly for the rest.

"These are the main conditions. I hope they will suit you. I am expecting either the contract to sign, or a definite *no* to settle the matter: as I have other answers I must send. You understand, my dear Lanari?"

But matters did not work smoothly. In a letter to Florimo, dated a few days earlier (on August 4), Bellini seems to be very doubtful of the acceptance of his demands: but Mme. Malibran looms large in his mind's eye, and he

betrays the wish to see her master two other of his operas, as she had done *La Sonnambula*, *Norma* and *I Capuleti ed i Montecchi*. "Tell Cottrau," he writes, "he is to make Mme. Malibran sing *Il Pirata* and *La Straniera:* that will be capital; you can arrange the cast, which I couldn't do from here, as I am working on my opera." Two months later, everything collapses: the counter-proposition made to Bellini he indignantly flouted as unworthy of him; on October 10 he wrote to Florimo: "I can quite imagine what effect my answer must produce on those overweening fools, and am glad I sent it in that form having regard to their offer, so as to make them swallow their own disgraceful proposal to Cottrau . . ." But his mind still dwells on Mme. Malibran, and, as nothing could be effected at Naples, he bethought himself of Milan, where the Theatre della Scala was controlled by Duke Visconti; in the same letter he goes on to say: "I have written to Giuditta[1] so as to reply to Duke Visconti; my answer is, if he will give me £2,000 cash down for three operas, I will accept, all three to be written for Mme. Malibran, or Mme. Pasta. I am awaiting a reply."

[1] Giuditta Grisi, sister of Giulia the famous singer, and herself not undistinguished.

And further on still, speaking of his *Beatrice di Tenda:* "I hope Beatrice will not be judged immoral, for she loved her husband only, and is not guilty of one thought for Orombello; also, I wish to hope that Mme. Malibran will take the part. . . . Persuade Cottrau to induce her to play in *Norma;* and say provincial conventions do not count against such talents as Mme. Malibran's. . . ."

At last another project, much less ambitious, was offered to Naples, simply to play *I Puritani* as soon as this opera had been produced at the Italian Theatre in Paris, modifying it suitably, especially for the benefit of Mme. Malibran. Whilst favouring this scheme Bellini would not abandon the Milan proposal, as this extract of another letter to Florimo shows (November 30):—

"I have just heard of Mme. Malibran's brilliant success in *La Sonnambula;* it was what might have been expected. If she would only play *Beatrice di Tenda*, both in Naples and Milan, where she could produce it so effectively. Then my poor *Beatrice* might return to life, and, like *Norma*, perambulate the theatres. You advise me to finish up my *I Puritani* with a big scene for the *prima donna*. I did intend to do so, but,

in consequence of some very proper changes in the second act, the singer's scene comes in the middle of this act, a situation rather like the quatuor of *Nina*, but with a different setting, passing through phases of melancholy, gaiety, dimness, and ending in a vigorous *agitato*. So another scene at the end, perhaps misplaced, could only injure the whole, so I have decided to close it with a little duet, graceful or passionate, between the tenor and the *prima donna* like that in the first *finale* of *La Sonnambula*. It would be preceded by a *largo* concerted between the two basses, the tenor, the soprano and the chorus, as in *Norma*. I think it will go pretty well, the situation being interesting during the whole performance. Yes, certainly, I will do a new *cavatina* for Mme. Malibran. In a few days I will start on the Naples opera; I have already taken it into account, and think it will do very nicely for Pedrazzi, Duprez, Porto, whom you will please tell what are their parts, and for the all-powerful Mme. Malibran, whom you will see for me; please to scold her soundly for not calling on me whilst she was passing through Paris, and then express my gratitude to her for the tremendous work she always puts into my operas. Tell her I hope to write a couple of operas for her at Milan, if that

miser Visconti will at least give me as much as Naples does; that, if she likes, she can comply with our common wish by writing to the Duke, or still better, talk to him when she has a chance, and telling him I can undertake no engagement before 1836, on account of my promises to Naples. Lastly, tell her I will arrange and adapt *I Puritani* for her voice, and she need not fear the part, as it is as passionate as *Nina*, and the situations spoken and acted in prose by her would by themselves be tremendously effective. Also tell her I am longing and waiting for an opportunity of showing her how great my admiration is. . . ."

Yet, as has been said, all this planning was to come to nothing. Difficulties and accidents supervened which I am not able to set out; and despite the endeavours of Florimo, Cottrau, and, above all, Mme. Malibran, *I Puritani* was never played at Naples; and Bellini, a fortnight after the expiry of Mme. Malibran's engagement, on February 18, 1835, wrote expressing his disappointment to his friend Florimo: "My dear Florimo,—I have just heard of all the accidents which have prevented my *I Puritani* being acted, and all the effort our dear Mme. Malibran has made to get it staged, and

if one thing irritates more than anything else in this contrary world, it is that this angel has not been able to sing *I Puritani* to the Neapolitans." And he ended thus: "Good-bye and my best love. Please thank my dear Mme. Malibran for me, and tell her I shall always love her. Her behaviour in this matter made me wish to be at Naples to kiss her despite every one. But I hope to meet her one day, and won't answer for any consequences. . . ."

However, all this while, the Neapolitan season went on, and if they could not contrive to get a Bellini opera, the San Carlo management did present to its public two new works: one comic, by Lauro Rossi, called *Amelia, ovvero la Costanza premiata;* the other serious, by Persiani, called *Ines di Castro,* both with Mme. Malibran in the title-rôle. As to Rossi, it was she who unlocked the stiff gates of the San Carlo to him; for all this, she, despite her presence, owing to a sudden whim, was one of the causes of this opera failing utterly. It was a case to which Lafontaine's precept applied, "Ne forçons pas notre talent." This is a faithful description by an eyewitness of the production and the fiasco of *Amelia,* on December 31, 1834: "After writing four scores at Rome, Lauro Rossi produced his *Casa Disabitata* at Milan, a comic opera which

enjoyed great success, and under its second title, *I Falsi Monetari*, made the tour of Italy, and was called Rossi's *Barber of Seville*. Mme. Malibran herself was so delighted on hearing the piëce that she wanted Rossi to write an opera for her. For this purpose she made him sign a contract with the management of the Naples theatres; and Rossi wrote his *Amelia*, which was produced in 1834 on the grand stage of the San Carlo. But what are women, even the most gifted, or the greatest geniuses, as was Mme. Malibran? Their guiding-star is caprice, which almost always controls all their actions. The *diva* got it into her head to introduce a scene into *Amelia* in which she and Mathis the singer could dance together. The news spread throughout Naples; the whole city was in turmoil, and accounted him happy who secured a seat. The opera commenced: she sang—but the public, eager to see the great singer move her legs, paid no attention to the song, or the music, and began to fidget that she did not begin dancing. A general atmosphere of expectation: but the legs in dancing were not as deft as the throat in singing, and Mme. Malibran at this strange representation earned the general disapproval. The discontent caused by this vagary extended to the opera, which

was banned, like her dancing, though unheard and still less listened to, and fell involved in the failure of the first.[1] . . ."

Another witness, Guillaume Cottrau, in a letter to his brother, supplements the history of this lamentable mishap. "Between our two selves, *Amelia*, an opera with great expectations, did not come up to them, though the music is natural and sweet. The experiment of a comic opera composed for the San Carlo (where we only had scraps given us), after mounting it at the Fondo, could not stand against the lack of sympathy on the part of the Neapolitans and their old admiration for a theatre they looked on as allowed for grand opera only. They were thus declaring it sacrilege, especially as the subject of *Amelia* does not lend itself to dramatic effects, and as Mme. Malibran was poorly supported by Pedrazzi, Frezzolini, and a crowd of second or third-rate *cani*;[2] also as the play was disgracefully mounted with old scenery, worn almost threadbare, and all hanging crooked, not to speak of the costumes of all sorts and all periods, looking more like acted charades. To complete the picture, a wretched mazurka

[1] Francesco Florimo: *Cenni storici sulla scuola musicale di Napoli.*

[2] These *dogs* to whom the writer refers were Raffaelli and Mmes. Salvetti and Zappucci.

which the mulish caprice of Mme. Malibran insisted on dancing in the second act, with a man called Mathis! That sent all of our wigs flying! In a word, the opera, though occasionally applauded in the four songs of Mme. Malibran, has failed, and will not be kept for long in the repertory."[1]

This scathing criticism did not apply to the second work, Persiani's *Ines di Castro*, first acted at the San Carlo Theatre on January 28, 1835, by Mme. Malibran, supported by Duprez, Porto, Raffaelli, Balestracci, and Mmes. Albini and Zappucci. This, the best opera written by Persiani, was a real success, and was soon sought after and played on all of the great musical stages of Italy, where it enjoyed a long life. Still, even this good result was somewhat affected by certain extraneous accidents, mentioned in this curious letter of de Bériot to the advocate Parola at Milan :—

"NAPLES, *3rd February*, 1835.

"My dear Parola,—

"On Wednesday last *Ines di Castro*, Persiani's opera, was performed for the first time. I promised to tell you about it. So I will set about it in time for the evening's

[1] *Le Portefeuille d'un mélomane.*

courier. The work is decidedly sound from one end to the other, and has been completely successful ; all the more, as it is only the third opera at Naples which has come off well for fifteen years ; viz. [Donizetti's] *Esule di Roma*, [Pacini's] *L'ultimo Giorno di Pompei*, and this one. All the rest were mercilessly hissed off.

"*Ines di Castro* is an opera cut out for broad effects in a great theatre. The action never flags ; one *terzetto* scene in the second act moves almost to tears, the moment when Ines kisses her children, never to see them again. Ines is one of Marietta's most beautiful parts in all of her stock. The tenor's part (taken by Duprez with great merit) is also very carefully thought out. In a word, it makes a superb opera. But, my dear Parola, this is a country in which Rossini's masterpieces have been hissed one after the other, and I question whether a composer's deserts are alone sufficient to make a piece go. . . . Well, no ; and, to understand the lucky star of *Ines di Castro*, I will tell you, that, if you lifted the veil over the *arcana*, there would come to light, first, fifty ducats in the pocket of the conductor, without which this gentleman is never kind to the writer, or assiduous or attentive at the rehearsals, or lets his orchestra play together in time ; secondly,

a similar amount in the pocket of the choir-conductor, without which the choristers have no lungs. And you would see that even the tailor palms his little contribution; otherwise the actors would be dressed like pigs, and the opera kept back at least one month. In a word, everything is bought, because everything is on sale, friendship, consideration, willingness, all assessed on the same scales, 'Will you come up to my price?' Even silence in a theatre; silence in the wings has its market value, and the poor author who does not pass all these tests will find insuperable foes across his path. Persiani had the good sense to think of these details in time; and they say the poor fellow has given away every farthing he has made by his opera. Thus, quite contrary to custom at San Carlo, the orchestra played together, the costumes and scenery were sumptuous; and the rags with which Amelia was covered contrasted with the gorgeous array of gold and splendour on Ines di Castro. Very degrading, my dear friend, but face the facts. I am so disgusted with it all, that I am looking forward to the day when I shake off the dust of Naples, and never return again. It will be the red-letter day of my life. One word more about *Ines*. The success of the opera has mortally

offended two parties, the *Ronzists*, because of Maria ;[1] the *Barbaists*, because of the Society.[2]

"What don't they do to paralyze the effect of this music? An order has been issued forbidding applause more than once, and more than one call. It followed that yesterday's production (the third of *Ines*) was shortened up by the police, and became quite like an everyday performance. Maria cried about it ; for there is nothing she loves as much as exciting popular enthusiasm ; it is really the only reward a true artist gets. I go on telling her there could be no greater proof of her ascendancy than that it must be repressed forcibly.

"I am still anxiously awaiting a decision from Paris. Troupenas has written, but says nothing fresh. The matter will be adjudicated on soon ; that is all.[3] I have written to Lucca, and am also expecting an answer from them. I hope soon to have some news for you. Meanwhile, my best wishes to you once more, and please give our best regards to the Duke and Duchess.

"C. DE BÉRIOT.

[1] The partisans of Mme. Ronzi de Begnis, who was, as we said, the King's favourite.

[2] The faction of Barbaja, the former director of the San Carlo theatre ; he had been replaced by a syndicate.

[3] De Bériot refers to the suit to dissolve Mme. Malibran's marriage, which was to have been decided at Paris that February.

"*P.S.*—Our best regards also to Bassi, D. Cicio, etc. I think the Rossi affair will end at Venice, for at Naples we shall not be in time to take the oath in his presence.

"Mme. Tacchinardi is, I believe, engaged for Paris.

"The ridiculous rumour of the stabbing (?) has reached even Paris; the French papers talk of it with pompous certainty. They were going to play Bellini's *I Puritani* here; but the score has not arrived; so that Bellini's contract with the Society is broken not only as regards this opera, but also as regards the two he should have written last year. He was to have got 9,000 ducats for the three operas. I tell you this in case the Duke might like to renew the Society's offer. I think it would be a good speculation."

The success of *Ines di Castro* was not to prevent Mme. Malibran playing in a third new opera before she left Naples, in which she had promised the author to take the principal part; it was Luigi Ricci's *Il Colonello*. But a serious accident, which might have had graver consequences, made this impossible; and she could not keep her word. One day whilst driving in Naples with a young French doctor,

Thibault, the horses shied at some mad animal that jumped between their legs, and took the bit between their teeth, got out of hand, and rushed along, upsetting and breaking the carriage. The young doctor got nothing worse than a shaking ; but his companion fell so badly that she broke her wrist, not to speak of being bruised on her face and all over by the fall. Guillaume Cottrau, again, is our authority for the story, which he told in a letter to his brother with exact and circumstantial detail one would get nowhere else :—

"Mme. Malibran was coming back with Thibault in the latter's little carriage from a confetti fight in Toledo,[1] one Sunday in Carnival week. Jenny and I had gone that evening to call on Mme. Lagrange, and were very astonished to find Maria lying stretched out on the sofa by the fire-place, one arm in a sling, Marquess de Louvois at her feet, nursing her like a child of four years old. The carriage had fallen when night was coming on, at the last corner of the Villa Reale, where carriages had to stick in the mud, whilst the side-walk (now enlarged) was being repaved. A pig, which was just going to be killed in the street beside the

[1] The Via di Toledo, the finest and largest street in Naples.

flaming wood-pile on which he was to roast, escaped, to the consternation of the ring of *lazzaroni* and fishermen who were watching the sacrifice, and dashed under the horses' feet, who took the bit between their teeth and broke the fore-part of the vehicle in which Mme. Malibran and Thibault were. The latter, who was unscathed, carried her in his arms to the tavern beside the Church of Santa Maria della Neve, and there reset her wrist. Thence he took her two steps on to Mme. Lagrange, who was staying in the last house in front of the Torretta, where the Via di Piedigrotta opens out."

There was a great stir throughout all of Naples when the news of the accident spread, which might have meant the famous singer's death. All classes were moved; from all sides the famous patient received most touching proofs of how she was loved, for she had the same power, as a woman, of winning affection, as she had, as an artist, of earning admiration. Of course, she was condemned to a few days' absolute rest. Still, as soon as she was able, before even her wrist had quite set, she was eager to go into harness again. We know how courageous she was. With one arm in a sling and not quite healed, she reappeared on the San Carlo stage on February 23, in *La*

Sonnambula. What a welcome she obtained from her public which adored her and swore by her, how they cheered, vociferated, stamped, cried aloud for joy and enthusiasm, may be guessed. After each scene she was recalled; after each song endless bravoes. "So much so," one paper said, "that the demonstration went beyond the bounds of reason, and the police, to hem in this excess of frenzy, had to revive an old ordinance (which de Bériot has acquainted us with) requiring the Neapolitan audience to cheer a song once and once only." A strange bye-law, but quite comprehensible, as the facts stood.

After an accident which had been so serious, no extraordinary work could be undertaken, if only for lack of time. So Mme. Malibran had to give up playing *Il Colonello*, and to disappoint her expectation and the author's hopes, and to be content with finishing the season on the operas in her repertory.[1] She had already engaged herself to go to Venice to the Teatro della Fenice, and left Naples, with her health hardly restored, in the first week of March,

[1] *Il Colonello* was played without her at the San Carlo on March 24. "The part of Mme. Ungher," says Guillaume Cottrau, "had been written for Mme. Malibran. She was set upon acting it, and went away from Naples with keen regrets that she could not do so, because of the dislocation of her wrist" (*Le Portefeuille d'un Mélomane*).

intending to rest a few days at Bologna. But at Bologna she found she had not reckoned with her friends and admirers, and could not hold out against their importunity. So, on the 11th, she sang at a concert of the Société du Casino, and again, on the 16th and 18th, at two other concerts given at the Teatro del Corso.[1] Then she travelled to Venice, where she was to start on the 24th; but, as things worked out, her first production was to take place on the 26th.

She selected *Otello* to inaugurate her first season at Venice, where every one was all agog to hear her, and received her, as always, with wild acclamation. A letter of hers (I do not know to whom), with all of almost childlike charm and grace bubbling over with mirth and humour, tells us the story of her arrival and first days at Venice:—

"Venice, 28*th March*, 1835.

"My dear good friend, don't start scolding me, or thinking I could forget you. The devil, or rather the Emperor (whom God preserve in His infinite mercy), has upset all of our plans; as we have sent about from pillar to post until we got the famous permission to play on the

[1] Gaetano Barbieri, *Notizie biografiche.*

24th?[1] Then we set out at once for Venice. It would be too long a story to describe the enthusiasm which has anticipated my every step.

"But I must tell you of one little incident that happened before we arrived. You know the lottery is at least as popular at Venice as at Naples. Very well, dear papa, the lower classes were staking 10 on the *singer*, 17 on the day on which they announced my first production, 24 the day of the first production, and 6 for the six performances I am to give. . . . Would you believe that all four numbers won, and the lowest gained nine hundred Austrian pounds?

"So the Venetians say I have a lucky star, and therefore they follow me about as do the little dogs watch-dogs, pugs, greyhounds, bow-wows, and other bipeds, both the people and the denizens of the Court and the Court-yard; happily the pigs haven't put in their plea, as they do at Naples; they are making lithographs of me, my fall, my departure from Naples, and my arrival at Venice.

"I have made an innovation here which will mark an epoch in my Annals. I have made a revolution. I have transmogrified the reflections of the Canal and the boats on it. I have

[1] No doubt, referring to one of those idiocies of the police, the senseless and stupid hindrances, which the Austrian administration of Italy delighted in, with its usual pestering and intolerable fashion.

a gondola painted grey outside, with clocks and buttons in gold and silk; the gondoliers in scarlet jackets, yellow straw hats with black velvet ribbons, breeches of a deep blue stuff with braid at the side *à le pais de France*, but in red: sleeves and collars of black velvet. The inside scarlet with blue curtains. They know who it is when I go by. The truth is I could not make up my mind to enter one of those live coffins of gondolas black inside and outside.

"I could not start here until the 26th: the 24th was a festival they keep at Venice. I will not tell you of the enthusiasm I have been fortunate enough to rouse them to. Yesterday I did *Otello* for the second time. . . . Good-bye.

"M.-F. MALIBRAN."

It is ringing the changes on the same words, when the impression is to be described, created by Mme. Malibran's singing, on those who were able to hear and admire her. Acclamation, enthusiasm, frenzy, madness; there is no escape from the form, and the eternal reiteration of similar expressions becomes weariness at last, and sets the nerves on edge. The Athenians grew aweary, they say, of hearing Aristides called the Just. But what is a writer to do, when he is reading the accounts, which

are always the same, of triumphs, always the same, of this matchless artist, wherever she went? Venice was the same story as the other cities; perhaps more so, with a people so impressionable and sensitive to the charm of music and the spell of the living human voice. The pit of a Venetian theatre should have been seen, a performance at the Fenice or the Teatro Malibran witnessed, to be able to conjure up and grasp the very real experience which the *popolani* and *pescatori* heard; all of them poor devils who next day might be seen at their work, carrying out their handicrafts in the little narrow streets of the Merceria, round about the Rialto, or on the quay degli Schiavoni; going in the evening to pay a few *soldi*, to listen with a childish glee to a Bellini or Verdi opera, and sometimes giving a smart reproof to any singer who was taking them too easily and lackadaisically.

This much is certain, that Mme. Malibran produced an electrifying effect on the Venetians, at once became their idol, sometimes to the pitch of her own inconvenience. All day long, as she herself tells us, she was followed everywhere, and even plagued; the police not infrequently had to clear her a passage through the mob. At night, after leaving the theatre, and undergoing the usual ovation, she was accompanied

home by torchlight processions, huzzaing with all their lungs, gondolas gathering like fireflies around her own, and escorting her down the Grand Canal. And she was lucky if she could go to bed in peace, if she were not serenaded under her window up to two or three a.m.[1]

Just now I mentioned the Malibran Theatre. The name still remains as a memorial of her flight through the enchanted city, and commemorates not only the artist, but the woman in her, her ordinary kindness and generosity.

She had already given her six contracted performances at the Fenice, and had played *Otello*, the *Barber of Seville*, *Cenerentola* and *Norma*, and was preparing to leave, when a poor but fine fellow, Giovanni Gallo, the director of a theatre blessed with the name of Emeronitio, called on her. It was the third theatre of Venice by right of seniority, dated from 1677, and up to 1834 had been known as the Teatro San Giovanni Grisostomo.[2] Just then it had been renovated throughout, and been dubbed with its new title. But it scarcely

[1] She was living in Venice at the Barberigo Palace.

[2] The first of the theatres still existent at Venice was the San Luca (now the Goldoni), dating from 1629; the second the Camploy, dating from 1635; next came the Malibran, built in 1676 as the San Giovanni Grisostomo; then the San Benedetto, now the Rossini, founded in 1755; and lastly, the grand musical theatre, the Fenice, only about a century old, built in 1790.

prospered under either designation, and, just when Mme. Malibran was in Venice, the director, Giovanni Gallo, was in deep waters, bankruptcy being only a matter of days. The good fellow had a sudden idea. He went to see Mme. Malibran, told her how he stood, disclosed his anxieties, and begged her to give two performances at his theatre, and so retrieve his disasters. He offered her, knowing full well what he was about, £120 after each production.

She wavered a while, but assented at last. But the *podestà* of Venice, one Boldù, heard of the matter and induced Gallo to cede him one of the two performances for the Fenice, in consideration of half of the net proceeds. It was understood that Mme. Malibran should appear a seventh time at the Fenice and give her last performance at the Teatro Emeronitio. At the Fenice she played the *Barber of Seville*, with Donzelli, Cambiaggio, Balfe, Fontana and Lombardi to support her, on April 3; the receipts came to £290 10*s.* 5*d.*, and the net balance, after deducting the expenses £60 10*s.* 5*d.*, to £230, of which half, £115, was Gallo's share. The *podestà* had to pay £120 to Mme. Malibran, and if, financially, he had not made a good thing out of it, he had at

least given the frequenters of the Fenice a great pleasure; whilst Gallo had no reason to complain of the deal. On the second performance, at the Teatro Emeronitio, the huge auditory of which could take in two thousand five hundred spectators, she played *La Sonnambula*,[1] and the hall, despite its vast size, was, as might be expected, filled to repletion, so that the receipts exceeded those at the Fenice, reaching the amount of £382 13*s.* 4*d.*; after paying the expenses £97 13*s.* 4*d.*, and Mme. Malibran's fee, the balance belonging to Gallo came to £165.

But there was a surprise in store for him yet. He turned up next morning at Mme. Malibran's punctual to the minute, with a messenger beside him bearing the £120 in all sorts of specie—for, at this time, gold and bank-notes were scarce and not in general circulation. He was admitted to see the singer, and, after paying his respects and offering his thanks, he said:

"Here is the sum we agreed on."

"What sum?" she replied, with an air of surprise.

[1] On April 8, the cast supporting Mme. Malibran consisted of Casali, Balfe, Lombardi, Fontana, and Signora Bramati.

"Oh, the £120 for yesterday's performance."

"I don't want your money. Take it all away, and spend it on your children. You shall kiss me, and we'll be quits."

Did the good fellow believe his ears? His two performances had brought him in £400 in round figures, had saved him from bankruptcy, and, to crown his joy, he kissed Mme. Malibran!

He thought, but could devise no better means of acknowledging and testifying his gratitude than to change the name of his theatre. He first named it Garcia, but soon, to obviate all possible confusion, he substituted Malibran. Since then the Teatro Malibran of Venice has ever borne this glorious name.[1]

[1] I have derived all the particulars of the quaint story from a curious *feuilleton*, published in the paper *Venezia*, in July, 1890. The writer himself drew his information from the archives of the Teatro Fenice, where, in especial, he had found the memorandum of Mme. Malibran's two performances drawn up and signed by Gallo himself. I should add that the Venetians, in connection with this, as a proof of their thanks, gave Mme. Malibran a frantic ovation; and the tale was set down in verses—what verses, too!—in a pamphlet, called *Récit de l'ovation de Mme. Malibran à Venise*, by Léon de Montbeillard, dedicated to the Marquess de Louvois (Lausanne: Samuel Delisle, 1835, 8vo, 11 pages).

CHAPTER X

Marriage judicially annulled—The judgment—Passes through Paris on way to London—Plays *Fidelio* at Covent Garden—Triumph—From London goes to Lucca—Driven out by cholera—Dangerous journey to Milan, where reappearance at Scala produces a sensation—Hears of Bellini's death, and weeps—Plays a new opera by Vaccaj.

WHILST staying at Venice Mme. Malibran received intelligence of the judgment of the Court of First Instance of the Seine, annulling her marriage. I have already said, and it is easy to understand, how she had this matter at heart. She had been anxious about it ever since she left America; but the obstacles were considerable, as in all such cases, and the preliminaries of the case had taken up several years, despite the moral support and assistance Mme. Malibran found on all sides, amongst others from General La Fayette, who took the greatest interest in it, Cottinet, her advocate (the father of Edmond Cottinet, the dramatist), and Baron Pérignon, one of the judges on the Court.

In the Sessions of February 20th and 27th, 1835, the matter was decided; and, to make the complications clearer, I cannot do better

than set out the statement of Maître Marie, Mme. Malibran's advocate :—

"In 1826 Mlle. Garcia was at New York, and there began the brilliant career which France has set her seal on. M. Malibran, a merchant, asked her hand in marriage, and the ceremony took place before the French Consul.

"M. Malibran was a Frenchman by origin, but had left his own country and long been domiciled in America, where he had been naturalized ; the document which proclaimed a citizen of the United States contained an express renunciation of his French citizenship.

"Mlle. Garcia was the daughter of Manuel Garcia, a celebrated artist widely known in all the capitals of Europe. By birth he was a Spaniard, and had never been naturalized in France ; his daughter, though born in France, was a Spaniard, like her father.

"Thus, practically, two foreigners, an American and a Spaniard, came before the French Consul, who thought he was, as a civil officer, able to marry these two aliens.

"Was he wrong? That was the question.

"Since their marriage, M. and Mme. Malibran had returned to France. Mme. Malibran had a separate establishment from her husband. M. Malibran had declared to the Government that he was returning home to be domiciled at home,

and requested to be allowed to enjoy full civil rights. On October 6, 1831, he was accorded by Ordinance what he requested; and, since then, M. Malibran had permanently resided in Paris.

"With these facts in view, Mme. Malibran was approaching the French Courts to demand the quashing of her marriage on the ground of nullity.

"The plea raises two questions: first, are the French Courts competent to determine nullity; secondly, and fundamental, should the marriage be declared null?"

At the first sittings, Maître Marie dealt with these two questions in succession. After his speech on the second point, the marriage was declared void. It appears to me quite pertinent to reproduce the judgment literally from the *Gazette des Tribuneaux*:—

COURT OF FIRST INSTANCE.
4TH CHAMBER.
Session, 6th March.

(M. Bosquillon de Fontenay, presiding;
MM. Pérignon and Prudhomme, judges.)

Malibran v. *Malibran.*

Demand for a declaration of nullity of marriage.

(This is the text of the judgment in this case, the particulars of which our readers already know. It presented two very difficult legal questions.)

"Whereas, in law, according to the terms of Article 13 of the Civil Code, any stranger, who with the authorization of the King had been allowed to domicile himself in France, enjoys all civil rights as long as he resides in France:

"And whereas he is, for such period, amenable to the French Courts, and can be summoned before them in any case whatsoever, thereby differing from the foreigner who is not resident in France, and is only subject to French jurisdiction in the cases specified by Article 14 of the Civil Code:

"And whereas, in fact, by Royal Ordinance of the 6th October, 1831, Malibran has been allowed to establish his domicile in France, and it is known that he resides in Paris:

"And whereas the claim against him made by Mlle. Garcia has been regularly brought before the tribunal of the Seine, which is controverted neither by the said Malibran, nor by the public ministry:

"Therefore the Court declares its competence, and renders judgment as follows:—

"Whereas, in cases to determine the validity of marriages between foreigners, the French law is not applicable, but that of the personal status of the parties to the contract:

"And whereas at the time of the marriage celebrated before the French Consul at New York between Mlle. Garcia and Malibran on the 23rd March, 1826, the plaintiff was a Spaniard born in Paris of a Spanish father, who was not a naturalized Frenchman; and Malibran was a citizen of the United States of America in virtue of letters of naturalization issued to him at New York on the 31st March, 1818:

"And whereas it appears from the papers exhibited in this case that both American law and Spanish law deem a marriage contracted in America between a Spaniard and an American before a consul of some other nation null and void, because of the incompetence of the celebrating official, and that such absolute nullity which is of an official nature does not estop the parties to the contract in issue:

"For these reasons, the Court declares null and void the marriage celebrated on the 23rd March, 1826, at New York between Marie-Félicité-Garcia (born at Paris on the 24th March, 1808) and François Eugène Louis

Malibran (born at Paris on the 14th November, 1781) before Charles Louis Comte de Peuville, French Consul at New York, who was undertaking the functions of the public official who deals with French residents.

"And authorizes Mlle. Garcia to endorse this judgment on the margin of any acts and registers on which the said marriage is inscribed:

"And condemns Malibran to pay the costs."

Need one say whether Mme. Malibran was overjoyed at the news of this termination of her case? She was free again, free, released, after so many years, from a union she detested, at liberty to contract another marriage, which she had long desired. But this marriage might not be celebrated until after the expiry of the statutory time. No matter. The future was her own, now, and she could wait. She did wait thirteen months, and, as we shall see, on March 29, 1836, at Paris, where she insisted on the new union being consummated, she became the bride of Charles de Bériot.

She hastened her return to France, and as soon as ever her engagements at Venice were over, she started out on the road to Paris. *Le Ménestrel* of April 9, 1835, announced

her arrival in these terms: "M. de Bériot and Mlle. Garcia, formerly Mme. Malibran, arrived this week at the Hôtel Montmorency, boulevard Montmartre, on the way from Italy to Belgium. We have pleasure in announcing that this singer of world-wide fame is in the best of health, and is not suffering any more from her recent fall at Naples." One month later, on May 17, the same paper published the news that "The former Mme. Malibran, now Mlle. Garcia, who is soon to marry M. de Bériot, has, they say, a contract with Favart (*i. e.* the Théâtre Italien) for the next season."

This statement was premature, but based on fact; for it is certain that inducements were being offered to Mme. Malibran to attach her anew to Paris and the Théâtre Italien. She desired no better, but former promises prevented her carrying her wish into effect, as she explained in a letter some months later to Baron Pérignon, one of the judges in her case:—

"Milan, 14*th December*, 1835.

"My kind Sir, and dear Judge,—

"Ah, but you make my mouth water, saying I ought to come and play in my beloved Paris. It is true that I have received offers

through our friend Troupenas for twelve performances in April. But don't you know that at the end of March I shall have had seventy-five performances since the 15th September, and, in all, only one month's rest, including travelling? Then, there is my London season to get through, and this is the most tiring, two new operas to play in English, and two others which I must get up again. And then, I wish, when I reappear on the Parisian stage, to be in full possession of *all of my faculties*, not out of breath, as I should be, if I started after two such tiring seasons as those at Milan, and a journey across those icy mountains, those cliffs all rocking through the rainfall, which bring down avalanches and ravages to impede the traveller's progress, which is already slow enough, what with bad roads, poor postal service, etc., not to speak of the noble brigands—some new exploit of which we are always hearing of, some *enchanting murder*.

"No. No, my beloved Parisian shall hear me some day, when my heart shall have felt for one whole month no emotion, save the anticipation of the pleasure of meeting him again, and no other fear, except that I may not commend myself to him as much as before.

"But you won't be angry with me? I am grateful to the rumour of my engagement in Paris for getting me a delightful letter from my judge. Please contrive to hear of some other matter, so as to write me another longer letter about it, and tell me about Mme. ——, *whom I love with all my heart. Mind you tell her*, and make her send me a little *I love you* at the bottom of your message dispatched to me. Charles would be too glad to kiss her beautiful hands, if she would let him. Will you undertake this commission for him, and, for yourself, accept all of my best wishes?

"I will venture to tell you, my dear and kindly judge, that you have a very grateful friend in me.

"Maria Garcia."

After the day or two she spent in Paris after leaving Venice, expectations had been raised of seeing Mme. Malibran give a few performances there next spring; but, as her letter shows, this was practically impossible in view of her actual engagements. At her last stay, or rather, passage through Milan, in 1834, she signed a contract with Duke Visconti, the director of the Scala, to give one hundred and eighty-five performances, to be divided among

three seasons, seventy-five during the autumn and the Carnival of 1835–1836, the same number during the autumn and Carnival of 1836–1837, and thirty-five in the autumn of 1837. For these one hundred and eighty-five performances (of which she was fated only to give a part) she was to receive £18,000, *i. e.* almost £97 6*s.* apiece. But, prior to this, she had promised to go to London in the spring of 1835 for another season of English opera, and lastly, to interpose between the London productions and those at Milan a number of representations at Lucca. Thus she could not entertain any proposal from the Théâtre Italien, as she did not wish—see her letter—to reappear before her beloved Parisian public except in full possession of *all of her faculties*. But it was doomed they and she should never meet again.

However, we must follow her on her new journeys.

Just when *Le Ménestrel* thought it might announce her engagement at the Théâtre Italien, Mme. Malibran was already on her way to London—and had probably arrived at that time—for on May 19 she started at the Covent Garden Opera with *La Sonnambula*.[1]

[1] There is a mistake in Mme. Malibran's biography (by Julian Marshall) in Sir George Grove's *Dictionary of Music*

All the success she had gained the year before, welcomed her anew; but a more extraordinary triumph still was to greet her, one that illustrates the adaptability, variety and range of her peerless powers, in the English translation of Beethoven's *Fidelio*, a masterpiece she was playing for the first time. The impression she made, the effect she produced in this opera, is beyond description. One London critic thus sums up his appreciation of her: "It is very seldom on the stage that two such radiant stars meet in conjunction, Beethoven the composer, and Mme. Malibran the singer." A correspondent in the *Gazette musicale* indicates the pitch of enthusiasm, the tenseness of emotion with which the great artist's sublime interpretation wrought upon the spectators:—

"The dramatic gifts she evidences in the beautiful and striking rôle of Leonora draws a crowded house for every performance of this piece, and stirs up storms of enthusiasm. She is supreme both as an actress and a singer.

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and Musicians, where it reads, "She received at the opera in London during May and June, 1835, £2,775 for twenty-four performances." The terms of the contract made in 1835 between her and Alfred Bunn state that she was to give *nineteen* performances from May 18 to July 1 for £125 each, *i.e.* £2,375 in all. (*Vide* the appendix, p. 310, for the text of this agreement.)

Nothing is comparable with the throes of feeling she can inspire in the scene in which, disguised as the gaoler's servant, she follows him into her husband's dungeon to dig his grave. Her unabated anxiety to make out the prisoner's features, her passionate exclamation, '*Great God, it is he!*' when she falls in a faint on the edge of the grave, brought about a solemn silence. When she is leaving her retreat, and rushing in between her husband and his would-be assassin, her scream of agony terrifies the whole audience; when her husband is saved at last, that duet, that incomparable duet, of unrestrained joy was broken by the sobs and tears of the listeners. I had seen Mme. Schröder-Devrient play this part, and could never have imagined anything so fine, or pathetic; but she herself must bow down and give way before the unassailable genius of Mme. Malibran."[1]

Crowds, too many to number, gathered together to see and admire Mme. Malibran, now in *Fidelio*, and now in *La Sonnambula*, which she was singing in English at Covent Garden, whilst another artist, who was very great, though not her equal, Giulia Grisi, was

[1] *Gazette musicale*, July 5, 1835.

singing the same play in Italian at the King's Theatre.[1] Despite the sumptuous remuneration which the management of Covent Garden was paying Giulia Grisi, they had no reason to complain of this outlay; and, as evidence of this fact, the note published in the *Gazette musicale* (July 12) might be quoted: "Mr. Bunn, the director of the Drury Lane and Covent Garden Theatres, has just presented Mme. Malibran with a set of rubies and diamonds. The casket enclosing them bore the following inscription: *To Mme. Malibran, the most distinguished artist that Europe has ever known: a humble token of esteem from Alfred Bunn. London, 1st July, 1835.*"

This new London season was a series of sheer triumphs for Mme. Malibran. Besides the performances contracted for, she earned herself public applause at several concerts, of which the most notable was that on June 29. It was given by de Bériot, and, for the first time, Mme. Malibran and Giulia Grisi were heard

[1] Giulia Grisi's had a really great vogue; but Mme. Malibran, above all, shared the public favour with another artist of a different kind, the marvellous dancer, Marie Taglioni: "Two dramatic reputations are just now drawing London in throngs: Mme. Malibran, who is playing *La Sonnambula* at Covent Garden; Mlle. Taglioni, who has made her first appearance at the King's Theatre with *La Sylphide*" (*Le Ménestrel*, June 7, 1835).

singing together in the duet in *Semiramide:* she also took part in several benefit performances. One especially brilliant evening was the one at Covent Garden in which, on July 3, Mme. Malibran played in *Fidelio;* Lablache, Tamburini, Ivanof and Giulia Grisi in certain parts of *I Puritani*, *La Sonnambula* and *Marino Faliero;* Perrot and Marie Taglioni in *La Sylphide;* and, lastly, some of the best English actors also acted. The audience were literally packed like sardines, and over three thousand spectators were gathered together.[1]

Meanwhile Mme. Malibran was being expected at Lucca, where she went in the early days of August. But this time she did not enjoy her usual success; and her presence could not conjure away the panic-stricken atmosphere,

[1] I think it was at some time during this season that Mme. Malibran sent Bunn the following letter (undated), to acquaint him of her refusal to sing in an opera he had suggested. [This letter is in her own English]:—

"My dear Bunn,—

"I cannot promise to play the part of *Count Belino* (?). The music is exceedingly weak, and, after the *Sonnambula*, I am not capable of singing baby's music; however, I don't say positively *no*, until I have seen both the *Music* and the *pice* again, for it is about eight years that I have not even herd the part; therefore be so good as to send the whole to me, and I shall give you a *conscientious* answer, quite.

"A LA MALIBRAN."

consequential on the cholera plague which had just invaded Italy. She had given some performances of *Ines di Castro* and *Cenerentola* before an almost indifferent audience—an unprecedented event—and every one who could deserted Lucca, for fear of the scourge, and she, too, had to hurry away as well. A letter of hers to Marquess de Louvois, to inform him of her movements, depicts the situation :—

"Lucca, *2nd September*, 1835.

"Do come along soon to Milan, for we are all scampering away from here, not that the cholera has really come, but we're all frightened of a fine prospect of this delightful illness, which has hemmed us in with so many quarantines, and, incidentally, ruined my poor *impresario*. *Non dico niente* of ourselves : *basta :* don't let's think about it.

"The Duke has bravely led the retreat out of Lucca. Our pious Duchess has followed suit, without making any arrangement or leaving any money for these poor folk in the event of *choleric* illness. So be it. We are saved and keep in good health by the love of God and his confessor, and then, for fear of the adage of falling between two stools. . . . And there I stop, and never mind the discomfort.

"It seems that his Grace the Duke Visconti is horribly afraid of cholera, and would rather not have engaged me. Yet they say I am *devotedly* awaited at Milan, the Milanese being convinced that my appearance will *camphorize* away the partisans and propagators of the cholera. For myself I have no fear; I only dread the idea of singing to empty benches. . . . Oh, it is irritating! There is only one thing to do, to give plenty of parties, amuse oneself, laugh, diet oneself homœopathically; and, for the rest, trust to Providence.

"I hope the Marchioness is in good health; her perfect kindness to me I shall never be able to forget. I am feeling very melancholy, for nobody talks of anything but death, disease, cholera, the devil, hell and purgatory, in which last I am steeped up to my neck. So I won't go on plaguing you with my jeremiads, and will say good-bye, hoping to meet you soon at Milan.

"Good-bye, good-bye—by the way, write to that nice Mr. ——, whom I have not forgotten. You should have received a letter I wrote you just after reaching Lucca, in which I said we had spent a day with that delightful woman, the Marchioness de Lagrange, and that we talked a lot about you.

"Good-bye, with all my sincerest good wishes,

"Maria Garcia."

Mme. Malibran then proceeded to Milan. But the journey from Lucca to Milan, at such an extraordinary time, was quite a series of adventures, which one of her Italian biographers relates briefly: "She had determined on the route viâ Genoa. When she reached Carrara, she heard that cholera was raging there. So to reach Milan without delay and avoid Genoa, she thought it best to cross the rugged rocks of the Spolverina, over the heights of the Apennines, a road not negotiable by carriage. She went on horseback, and had her luggage taken on by mules or dragged by oxen. Fearless, and ungrudging of rewards to her numerous escort of mountaineers, she allowed them the greatest gift of all, what for them to expect would have been folly, to hear her sing: and, by modulating their village songs and heaping on those boorish souls delights which could never have reached their ears, she succeeded in arriving hale and safe after her perilous passage."

At length, not without difficulty, she reached Milan, and there, notwithstanding the adverse circumstances, her popularity awoke to new life in so splendid a way that it had, perhaps, never been so fiery, so wild, and so resistless: for, however universal the admiration of this wonderful woman, the demonstrations of it always pre-

sented some new feature. On her return to the Scala on September 12 Mme. Malibran played *Otello*, then *Norma;* and the last-named performance and her greeting at it are thus depicted by a correspondent of the *Gazette musicale:* "One of the last productions of Mme. Malibran at Milan has occasioned an unparalleled event in the annals of that theatre. She was singing in *Norma;* during the first act she was recalled *sixteen* times, which, according to Italian usage, beats the highest record known. When she reappeared in the second act, mere salvoes of applause became insufficient, a storm broke out, one of those terrific hurricanes of the Ocean misnamed the Pacific. Stamping, shouts of bravo, a pandemonium of noise lasted so long that the chief constable, who was present, thought fit to restore order. It was all in vain. For fifteen minutes the only spectacle was that given by the spectators. Then authority came on the scene; and the Mayor of the town, after at last securing a moment's silence, announced that if the excessive acclamations did not cease, he would be obliged to have the house cleared, as he could not be responsible for its solidity. This was the only way of curbing the people's enthusiasm. Perhaps the first time police measures have had to be employed to stop an artist being applauded."

Just when she was winning this triumph at Milan (most certainly unprecedented), the news reached her of Bellini's death at Puteaux on September 23. On being acquainted of the sad event, Mme. Malibran burst out into tears, and felt something of a melancholy prognostication. She put her hand on her forehead, and exclaimed, *Sento che non tarderò molto a seguirlo* [I feel I shall soon follow him]. No doubt she did not know how true her words were, for exactly one year later, on the anniversary of that very day, she followed this gentle poet to the tomb, after having contributed to his glory so much during her lifetime. On the morrow she wrote to Francesco Florimo, Bellini's devoted friend, saying: "This black day, the 23rd September, will be a day of ill-omen in the annals of the Italian stage." And, as soon as the question of a monument to the memory of the creator of *Norma*, *Beatrice di Tenda* and *La Sonnambula* was mooted, she sent a sum of £8 as subscription.

This Milanese season, of which Mme. Malibran was the delight and the glory, lasted less than six and a half months. She had as rivals and fellow-actors Reina, Marcolini, Poggi, Marini, Salvatori, Passini, Frezzolini, and Mme. Schoberlechner. She performed *Otello* and *Norma*, then *L'Elisire d'Amore*, *The Barber of Seville*,

Vaccaj's *Giulietta e Romeo*, Donizetti's *Maria Stuarda*, *La Sonnambula*, *I Capuleti ed i Montecchi* (by Bellini, the last act by Vaccaj), and a new opera by Vaccaj, *Giovanna Grey*, which was utterly feeble, and only her presence staved off complete failure. This piece was played on February 21, 1836, and she speaks of it in the following terms in a letter sent next day to Baron Pérignon: "Last night we did Vaccaj's *Jane Grey*. They say it is only respect of me that made them swallow the opera, that it is maddening to have to put one's tongue in one's cheek, that they all yawned so much that they could not hiss, in despite of all their good intentions. I did all I could, and put in all of my little self to swim through this muddy strait and emerge on the other side *not over-dirty*. I am so tired to-day that I haven't spirit enough to write more than one letter. This evening I am to do *Jane Grey* again. You will be more than kind if you will excuse me to that charming Mme. —— . . . , if I don't write to her: say I love her with all my heart, and only want an opportunity of proving it. My best love to my good brother Troptenace[1] and his delightful Clotilda. We are expecting a good long letter from you. I hope that my

[1] Troupenas, the editor; she is punning on his name.

expressions of affection for you will give you as much pleasure as yours have to me.

"Yours very sincerely,

"MARIETTE."[1]

During this season at Milan, Mme. Malibran was moved by the sudden death of Duke Visconti, the director of the Imperial and Royal theatres of this city, with whom she was on terms of fair intimacy. The blow did not affect her as deeply as Bellini's death, and only gave her a severe shock.

One month after the production of Vaccaj's *Giovanna Grey* (in which she took the title-rôle), she gave her last performance on March 20. The representation was entirely given up to Bellini, included *I Capuleti ed i Montecchi* and the last act of *La Sonnambula*. That night the admiration for her of the audience was manifested anew, and, to quote an Italian contemporary, "something took place which had never happened before at the Scala. Every one there seemed to be stirred by some madness, and every one feared he could not do enough. All

[1] This letter, save for these few lines, has no personal or artistic interest, but contains some of the prankish phrases she loved. Speaking of herself and de Bériot, she tells Baron Pérignon, "We are in life and death, your minions, children [*des enfants Ignon*]: you are our father, the *père Ignon* of our hearts. . ."

the rich gardens of Milan and the surrounding country had been stripped of their best so as to have a rain of flowers, in which the happy singer was enveloped. It was not merely the allegiance to a higher intelligence, not merely the farewell salutation ; it was rather the lover's good-bye, the exaltation of the sympathy between each individual there and the artist, the parting of the dearest of parents from the family." [1]

The Milanese, who knew that Mme. Malibran was booked for two years ahead, had no suspicion that whilst fêting her, and giving full vent to their enthusiasm, they were bidding her an eternal farewell.

[1] Gaetano Barbieri, *Notizie biografiche.*

CHAPTER XI

Spends some time at Paris—Marries de Bériot—Fights a musical duel with Thalberg—Admiration for great artists: Mlle. Falcon, Mme. Dorval, Mme. Pasta, Mlle. Carolina Ungher.

At last Mme. Malibran was to have her heart's desire. The very next day after that memorable night at Milan, she hastened away with the post to Paris, there to occupy her thoughts with her marriage, to be united with the man to whom she had given her vows of affection for life. In May, 1835, de Bériot wrote from London to a Parisian friend: "They tell us from Paris we shall have to wait the ten statutory months compulsory on widows-in-law. This is very irritating; but, besides and beyond this impediment, there remains the matter of domicile. Neither of us live at Paris, where the ceremony must take place, as the judgment was delivered by French law." To talk of a domicile for such flitting folk as professionals and opera singers! If the first difficulty was unsurmountable, the law allowing of no exceptions, somehow or other the second was circumvented: for, in fact, scarcely one month after their

arrival at Paris, on Tuesday, March 29, 1836, at 4 p.m., the marriage of those two great artists was celebrated at the *mairie* of the second *arrondissement*, and Mme. Malibran, whose witnesses were her two friends, Marquess de Louvois and Baron Pérignon, became Mme. de Bériot.[1]

At this point, I shall quote from Legouvé a most interesting little story of what happened on the eve of their wedding :—

"It was in 1836. Mme. Malibran came to Paris to celebrate her marriage with de Bériot. Owing to her travels and journeys our relations, but not our friendship, had been interrupted. She asked me to be one of the party at the *mairie*. When the official spoke the words of the Code, '*The woman owes obedience to her husband*,' she pouted gaily, shrugged her shoulders in a sprightly way, that the *maire* himself could not help smiling. That evening we all met at Troupenas' house, rue Saint-Marc, to spend a friendly musical evening: Thalberg had promised to come round.

[1] This *mairie* was then situated behind the Opéra (burned down in 1873), No. 2 rue Pinon, now Rue Rossini. Most of the English biographers mistakenly date her second marriage on March 26, instead of March 29.

He had never heard Mme. Malibran, and she did not know him. That evening, as soon as she arrived, she went up to him briskly and begged him to sit down at the piano.

"'Play before you, Madame, impossible. I am much too eager to hear you!'

"'But you won't hear me, M. Thalberg. I am really not here at all. Only a poor woman worn out with the day's excitements. I haven't a note in my throat. I should be frightful.'

"'All the better. I shall have all the more courage.'

"'You will have it? Well, here goes!'

"She kept her word. Her voice was hard, her genius had flown away. Her mother reproached her.

"'What do you expect, mother?' she replied. 'One's only married once in one's life.'

"She forgot she had married M. Malibran ten years ago.

"'Now, it's your turn, M. Thalberg.'

"He had not been married that same morning, and to have such a listener spurred him on, but did not disturb him, so he showed all his lightness of touch and largeness of manner, all that volume of sound, which made his piano sing most harmoniously. Whilst he played, Mme. Malibran's figure shone, her eyes lit

up, her mouth rose, and her nostrils expanded. When he was finished, 'Splendid,' she cried out. 'It's my turn now.' She started another piece. There was no sign of fatigue this time, or of languor. Thalberg was dumbfoundered and stared at the transformation and could not believe his eyes. It was no longer the same woman or the same voice. He could hardly mutter, 'Oh madame, madame!' and, at the end of her song, he got up quickly, and saying, 'My turn now!' started again. Not to have heard Thalberg on this occasion is not to have known the real man! Something of Mme. Malibran's genius had passed into his masterplay which was somewhat austere, and infected it with a fever. Electric sparks seemed to be flowing from his finger-tips. But he could not end his piece, for, towards the end bars, Mme. Malibran burst into sobs, her head dropped on to her hands, she was convulsed with tears, and had to be taken to her room. She did not stay there long; in five minutes she was back, her head up, and a gleam in her eyes. She ran up to the piano and cried out, 'Now my turn!' and delivered her shot in this strange duel: she sang four pieces one after the other, and in each grew grander and sublimer, until she saw Thalberg's face also covered with tears, as hers

had been, and ourselves silent, witnessing the sight of two great artists who did not know each other, revealing themselves to each other, vieing and attaining heights of art they had perhaps never climbed up to before."

But such a story need not have been cited if we only wanted to prove that Mme. Malibran, like all great artists, was a hearty appreciator of others, and that she was a keen admirer of great talent. As a fact, on the eve of her marriage, the day before this evening with its moving exhibition of skill, she had shown this same quality. She had been present at the Opéra at a performance of the *Huguenots*, a play then in all the flush of newness: and, vividly impressed with Mlle. Falcon's powerful interpretation of the part of Valentine, she could not restrain her desire of expression, went behind the stage after the first act, ran up to her, and, putting her arms round Mlle. Falcon's neck, "thanked" her effusively for the pleasure she had given her.

And, as she was as wonderful as an actress as she was matchless as a singer, it may be imagined that her sympathies were not confined to musicians and vocalists, but were easily won for any who distinguished themselves on the stage, in

whatever rôle it might be. The story of her interview with Mme. Dorval (whom she had gone to see at the Théâtre Porte-Saint-Martin in a loathly drama by Benjamin Autier and Alexis Comberousse, *L'Incendiaire, ou La Cure et l'Archevêché*) has often been told: this brave actress, despite the sorry nature of the piece, was sublime. Alexandre Dumas recently, perhaps rather romantically, has told the moving tale of this meeting, and it is worth while following his version of it:—

"There was one scene in this play in which Mme. Dorval on her knees played a confession which lasted a quarter of an hour; and for all this time no breath was heard, except that sobs mingled with the breaths.

"One evening Mme. Dorval was finer, more tender and more pathetic than she had ever been before. Why? I will tell you:

"She had attained sublimity, and for whose sake? She did not know; for a woman who had kept three hours thrilled by her eagle's glance. For all this space of time, all the rest of the house became non-existent to her. It was to this woman she had wept and spoken, acted and—lived. When this woman applauded and cried bravo, she had had the reward of her

trouble, the compensation for her effort, the meed for her genius, and had said, 'I am content, if she is!'

"Then the curtain went down; and, out of breath, broken and dying almost like a Pythian priestess who was being removed from the tripod, she had gone upstairs to her room, had laid down on the sofa; the victor vanquished.

"Suddenly the door opened, and the Unknown stood on the threshold.

"Mme. Dorval trembled all over, darted up, and took both of her hands, as though she were an old friend. The two women looked into each other's eyes, smiled, kept silence, and tears gathered in the eyes of each.

"The Unknown at last broke silence with an unbelievably gentle voice. 'Excuse me, Madame, but I could not go home to-night without acknowledging to you how much pleasure and delight and happiness I owe you. Oh, it was wonderful, marvellous, grand!'

"Mme. Dorval looked her through and through, thanked her with her eyes, and head, and especially with that significant shrug of the shoulders which was all her own; whilst every line and muscle on her face kept on visibly asking, 'Who are you, Madame, who are you?'

"The Unknown understood. And, with a

voice the gentleness of which only those who knew this great enchantress in private can realize what the gentleness was:

"'I am Mme. Malibran,' she said.

"Mme. Dorval gave an exclamation, and pointed to the only engraving on her walls: it was the portrait of Mme. Malibran and Desdemona. . . . .'"[1]

And, when it came to others who were following in her footsteps, singers whose success in Italian opera made them almost her rivals, she never took umbrage, could never be kept from recognizing their talents, and giving their accomplishments the full due.

Thus, when in Italy, comparisons had been instituted between her and Mme. Pasta, which did not redound very greatly to the latter's credit, Mme. Malibran had an opportunity of defending her against certain innuendoes; which she did with her usual frankness and loyalty, as the following letter shows. It was sent to Parola, a friend of hers, and an advocate at Milan:—

"My dear Sir,—

"I am writing without being sure if the post will be starting, but I cannot delay any

[1] *Le Constitutionnel*, May 24, 1849.

longer giving you news of our movements. In our usual rush we got to Modena on Monday at 9, in time to enjoy the performance (*La Sonnambula*) with our good friend Marchioness Carandini. After the play, to bed.

"Monday at 11 we flew with the post, and at 1 o'clock were at Bologna. Once more we got there in time to be present at the opera (*Norma*) and enjoy it. I left the theatre *more than ever* convinced that the rumours current at Milan as to the failure of this piece are all untrue. Mme. Pasta was warmly received, and cheered. After the *cavatina* (which she sang splendidly) she was recalled five times. After the *terzetto*, three times, and she was applauded at every exit. And after the duet with Adalgisa in the second act, twice. The duet with Donzelli was also encored and well sung; and after the curtain had fallen she was twice recalled.

"This may show you, that however good the intentions may be of people who say Mme. Pasta has had only moderate success, after these facts it can hardly be believed that they are very accurate. Therefore, whenever you hear such trash, read my letter, and believe no one else. In the interval I went to see Mme. Pasta, and she was very gracious. She asked for news of the Duke and Duchess Visconti,

and added that she, on behalf of the Milanese, had to thank me for the honour I had shown them by going to sing at Milan. You see no one could be nicer than Mme. Pasta. Please therefore tell all those eager sowers of false tales that they are *utterly wrong* with regard to her, and that she caused a sensation—I am the witness to attest it.

"Please, my dear lawyer, give our best regards to the good Duchess, to the Duke,[1] and the dear Baroness Battaglia, whom I have frequently spoken of to Princess Ercolani.

"Also our best love to Mme. Parola, and our kisses to the children, and an accolade from yours affectionately,

"M. Malibran."

I have said enough to prove that Mme. Malibran was just, even to her rivals, and could appreciate their talents with discrimination and sincerity. It was because, apart from what may be called her genius, she had the rare gift of not believing in her own perfection, and thinking that she had nothing more to learn. Possibly, this is one of the

[1] Duke Visconti, the president of the syndicate of the Scala. Parola lived at his house, and this inclines me to the theory that the latter had the affairs of the company in his charge.

characteristics of her great artistic nature and marvellous temperament, which, no doubt, has never been equalled. Even at the zenith of her ascendancy, in the very flood-tide of her fame, when her name stood out above all others and, by itself, sufficed to draw a crowded house and arouse universal enthusiasm, she knew a true artist must always try to improve and become more adept, must enlarge the ideal and horizon; that it was profitable to study what others did, draw their secrets, and appropriate their qualities when desirable, assimilate and annex them to her own gifts. This is what she did, to take no other instances, with a celebrated singer of her day, Mlle. Carolina Ungher: the evidence for this is derived from the correspondence to a French paper (the *Gazette musicale*, April 13, 1834):—

"I do not know whether we shall see Mlle. Ungher again next season: I, at any rate, hope we shall, for she is one of the best voices we have heard for a long time. This opinion is shared by Mme. Malibran, who is the greatest singer of our day. Every one knows the trouble and pains this consummate artist puts herself to to study the methods and faculties of her fellows. When she first came to Italy, she

only knew Mlle. Ungher by reputation. She had to hurry on to Naples, but would not pass by one city when Mlle. Ungher was singing, without stopping to hear her; she went to the theatre *incognito*, and must have been greatly impressed, to judge by a letter she wrote a few days later: 'I stopped here expressly to hear Mlle. Ungher; *the time I spent listening will not have been wasted.* I have one great advantage over her at present; I know the nature of her gift; she at present only knows my name, and I am not sorry.'"

Or again, another case to prove how much Mme. Malibran studied the ways of other singers, and the skill with which she contrived to borrow their methods and apply them herself. Speaking of Mme. Pasta (to whom I was just now referring), Castil-Blaze tells this ancedote:—

"Marietta Malibran arrived in Italy just when *Norma*, *La Sonnambula*, *I Capuleti ed i Montecchi* (operas by Bellini which heralded his death) had been acted by a famous *prima donna*. Mme. Pasta had reached the summit of her glory in her productions of *Norma* and *La Sonnambula*, the rôles of which had been arranged for her voice. Marietta got hold of

them, put them together, re-created them for herself, and with an artistic refinement the design or, I might say, perfidy of which soon became evident, she worked at developing with all of the brilliance and strength of her execution the parts which Mme. Pasta left colourless. She was rewarded with enthusiastic applause; but general opinion, whilst thanking her for revealing beauties unperceived until then, apprehended that she feared Mme. Pasta too much as a rival to venture on the same effects in the same passages. This was just the impression she aimed at making. As soon as she saw that criticism was decisive on this point, she changed her tune altogether, marched along her rival's track, and beat that great singer on her own ground, distinguishing herself and surpassing Mme. Pasta in all her most striking effects. A third trial was even more definitive, for she combined the wonders of execution of her first and her second rendering."[1]

All of these tales serve to point the vigour and fire Mme. Malibran put into her little musical duel with Thalberg on the evening after her marriage; it is fortunate that Legouvé was lucky enough to see this extraordinary contest, and able to record it.

[1] Castil-Blaze, *L'Opéra italien*, p. 450.

CHAPTER XII

Concerts at Brussels—Returns to London—Plays at Drury Lane—A new opera by Balfe—Serious accident—Falls from horseback with fatal consequences in end—Still goes on playing and disregards health—Returns to Brussels—Sings at Liège—At Aix-la-Chapelle—Rests awhile in France—Leaves for Manchester.

Mme. Malibran remained only a very short time in Paris after her simple wedding. She almost at once left for Belgium, and settled with de Bériot in the fine estate she had bought at Ixelles.[1] She calculated on a few weeks' rest there, which she had well earned, before paying her third visit to England. She only broke the interval by giving, together with her husband, two grand concerts in the early days of April, one of which was for the benefit of the Polish refugees. Then, in May, she went to London,

[1] Ixelles is a commune in greater Brussels, something like what Montmartre or Bertignolles formerly were before they were annexed to Paris. This estate of Mme. Malibran's has become the town-hall of Ixelles, and one street still bears the great singer's name.

to which she was pledged by a new engagement with Bunn, her loyal manager.[1]

On May 10, still singing in English, she once more made a triumphant entry on the stage at Covent Garden, where all her old admirers gathered round her. But all the serious work inseparable from the start of a new season could not prevent her thoughts straying to her distant friends, and keeping up her usual correspondence with them, and on the 12th she wrote to Baron Pérignon a letter as sprightly and whimsical as ever :—

"London, *12th May*, 1836.

"It is now your turn. I began with Mme. ——, but don't be jealous : I am winding up with you, as I have a rehearsal at ten o'clock. I will not tell you how I spend my day ; Mme. —— has my full diary. But this stands unalterable, whatever I may do shall not stop my thinking of my good friends at

[1] This is the note she sent announcing her arrival : "I have just arrived well, and at your service. I should like to go to the theatre this evening in the Dress Circle or in a Box. Do you think I could go ? One word in reply, and *my part if you please.*

"In haste,
"Maria de Bériot.

"No. 59 Conduit Street."

Paris: this is very nicely put, so that you may take it to include yourself.

"The gigantic *Don Juan* you speak of does seem to me a huge business: if it contain all you say it does, I am simply astonished it is over at 1 a.m. It really ought to last eight days, to be stage-managed like a lecture on anatomy: for the writer appears to me to love analyzing his human passions in the least profitable way—with some qualifications.[1]

"I positively forbid you to sentimentalize over my friendship for you. I don't know the lady and don't want to. Such a noodle! I will absolutely annihilate you if you ever mention the shrew again. So there, you old fossil, cannibal, seeking whom you may devour, you embelliedment, swelled head, squirmer, pettifogger and imbecillitudinarian![2]

[1] The reference is to Alexandre Dumas' *Don Juan de Marana*, a dramatic pantomime in prose and verse, first acted at the Théâtre Porte-Saint-Martin on April 30. Baron Pérignon had been describing it to her.

[2] She is evidently playing on Baron Pérignon's profession: he was, as has been seen, a judge.

[In this letter she is merely piling on epithets. A French friend tells me the following story, which may illustrate this rather haphazard collocation of opprobria: Two workmen had been quarrelling, and had exhausted both their breath and all their vocabulary of abuse. There was a pause. One had an inspiration. 'Espèce de géomètre!' he yelled out loud triumphantly. Thereupon a battle royal.—TRANSLATOR.]

"Thus, like Semiramis on her throne, *I juro* that my friendship for the father of the Ignons in the world, in the other part of the Universe and many other suburbs, is not mawkish: no mere *gnognotte*—I am not such a fool as all that, shattered as I am with over-exertion, but still gadding about pretty well on my two legs. The very-'aughtiest of the Bériots very much likes the lofty post to which you have just promoted him, but is sorry you did not add some little sub-alternate title, which he might have stuck on after, in order not to fall too fast post-haste, for such a tumble would be fatal, if it were to end with a Béri-all.[1] Oh Lord, this last one is hopeless. Let's forget it. Good-bye—in a hurry—for the carriage is waiting to take me to the rehearsal, and really I am so stupid, that I should only become stupider and stupider, if I went on.

"I am—No I can't—it's as though—but still—it might happen . . . yet, possibly, and all the same,

"Yours ever,

"Maria de Bériot."

Once more, Mme. Malibran was not content to give her English audience only her old

[1] *Haut béri, Bériot.* She was a terrible punster.

stock. She did not shrink from the toil of studying a new work, and willingly consented to take the principal part in Balfe's *Maid of Artois*, an opera written both in the manner of *La Sonnambula* and of *Clari*, Halévy's opera, which she had inaugurated some years previous at the Parisian Théâtre Italien. But, defective as the poem was in freshness and novelty, it was much worse, it seems, with the music of the composer, who had anyhow been to blame in this respect in former cases. One critic thus stigmatizes the work, which was acted at Drury Lane on May 27, 1836: "The author of the libretto has plagiarized one scene from *La Sonnambula;* but the composer has not stickled at taking other liberties with his contemporaries. Bellini, Rossini, Meyerbeer, Weber and others might all claim their share in Balfe's achievement; but it was especially one waltz by Strauss,[1] of Vienna, that won the new *English* opera loud and constant rolls of applause. This waltz was set as a final *cavatina*, and was sung by Mme. Malibran with incredible spirit; the audience were astounded, and wanted to hear her again. Both as an actress, and as a singer, Mme. Malibran was in this piece, as always what she always is, simply sublime. The

[1] Johann Strauss of Vienna.

English are right to call her *the unrivalled Madame Malibran.*[1] But we may congratulate Balfe on the happy selection of his inspirations!"[2]

But this much is certain: *The Maid of Artois* was a very great success, thanks to Mme. Malibran. Another letter of de Bériot confirms this fact, and gives us several other noteworthy details; the friend is our old acquaintance, Parola, the advocate at Milan:—

"LONDON, 26*th June*, 1836.

"My dear Parola,—

"I duly received the authorizations from Merelli and Balochino, which you sent me, and hasten to reply, although the business of the *meetings* is not yet over. I have accepted their proposals and written them duplicate letters to Vienna and Milan, as they requested.

[1] In English in original.

[2] The English correspondent of the *Gazette musicale*. In another issue the same paper wrote as follows: "Great gifts are rare; but it must be admitted that at no epoch have they earned as good harvests, perhaps because of their scarcity. Whatever the reason, to take an instance, Mme. Malibran de Bériot receives £150 for every one of her performances at Drury Lane, a fee never attained by any artist before her. Up to the present, the receipts at every production of hers have never been less than £600 a night."

You see, I am running a risk in acting on the authorization from Milan before we have decided what to do with our time during September and October. But I was forced into this line of action by the very short space of time which MM. Merelli and Balochino gave me to reply in : for you will realize that to come to an understanding with four committees, at Manchester, Liverpool, Norwich and Worcester, and then answer Milan, involved a longer time than up to the 10th July. Anyhow, matters are settled at Milan, and, please, go and see these gentlemen and confirm our acceptance.

"Nothing new to tell you about London. Giulia Grisi's marriage with M. Gérard de Melcy will not come to you as a surprise. You know what a vogue Balfe's *Maid of Artois* has had : we are doing it for the eighteenth time ; the house is always crowded ; and, probably, the contract will be renewed for some nights in addition.

"Our arrangements for September and October (if the *meetings*[1] do not come off) are to tour the provinces with the whole company from Drury Lane, going to Edinburgh, Dublin, Liverpool, or, perhaps, to go to Prague for the coronation of the Emperor of Austria. We

[1] In English in original.

shall decide in a fortnight. We have *three strings to our bow*, you see.

"Good-bye; send us a line to Brussels, where we shall arrive in a fortnight. My very best wishes and *my kind regards to your wife*.[1]

"Yours affectionately,

"C. DE BÉRIOT.

"Our best respects to our kind Duchess, and all good feelings, which please distribute as you think fit to any who remember us."

The story has now reached the last chapter of the life of this wonderful woman. We have come to the frightful accident—it may have been her fault, her stubborn foolhardiness—which had such fatal consequences for her. It has long been known she died of a fall from horseback; but what has not been remarked upon up to now, is that it was only her stupendous bravery, her contempt of any sort of precaution, and then only after some weeks' lapse, that this accident took on a serious and then irremediable character. There is no doubt, in my mind, that, had she from the first consented to take the essential care, and to condemn herself to the indispensable rest-cure, she would have weathered the storm and been restored

[1] In English in original.

to perfect health. But man proposes and God disposes!

As to the facts of the accident, there is only one source for information, viz. the detailed account of Countess Merlin, who, I think, had full opportunities of getting exact knowledge. I cannot do better than to reproduce what she says word for word :—

"One day, whilst at London, Lord L—— suggested an outing: it was to be on horseback, and Maria had no mount, and Lord L—— offered her one. De Bériot feared there might be an accident, but Maria, with whom any fancy became magnified into a passion, insisted. There was nothing for it but to give way. The party was made up. De Bériot would not go with them; and they started.

"Maria was usually very brave on horseback, and a splendid rider; but—perhaps because she was about to become a mother, though she did not know of this, and felt a double need of safety, or because she had a vague foreboding of disaster—anyhow she became nervous as soon as her horse started; the animal shied at the other horses who were following him, felt the uncertain hand on the reins, and began to gallop.

"Maria saw her hand was unsteady, and being near a barrier, signalled to a man who was holding it half open to hold in her horse; but the man was dazed, or perhaps simply a fool, and threw his cap into the air, and the horse was frightened, took the bit between its teeth and vanished out of sight. The other riders were too much alarmed to pursue it too closely, dreading they would excite the overwrought beast even more.

"A few seconds later, Maria felt the pommel which supported her knee slipping, and the stirrup on which her foot rested bending. She was almost fainting out of panic, and perceived very near her another barrier, but this time no one to stop her horse. One of the main-stays was high and dry in the air, and left a narrow passage . . . Maria felt she had no support . . . With the rapid pace of the animal she knew no obstacle could stay him, and that, by jumping the gate, he might kill her on the spot, and that she was lost.

"Then, as she approached the barrier, she thought she would lay hold of the upper portion in the hope that the horse would go on its course, and she, by her own weight, would drag the contrivance on the barrier down to the ground, and thus come scathless to her

feet. This calculation was the instinctive work of one second.

"But just when, with her arms up, she had left the saddle and had already gripped this tall end of the barrier, her foot, caught in the stirrup, made her relax her hold, and her body, falling backwards on the horse's crupper, glanced off, slid down, struck the ground, and was hauled along after the fiery horse as long as her foot remained entangled in the stirrup. Soon afterwards she was picked up in the road and brought home unconscious, her head one mass of wounds, and her face torn and irrecognizable."

De Bériot was out when she was taken home in this state. Countess Merlin says, when he came back, she kept back the truth at first, and said she had had a slight fall going up-stairs, and had hurt her head, but had come by little harm from the accident, and would play all the same that evening. "That same night she sang at the theatre as usual. With her marvellous courage she bore all the pain with unimaginable calmness, but she was struck to death. She had not been bled at once after the fall, and had taken no measures to stave off ill-effects, and too soon felt the results of her imprudence."

I should not care to say whether she really sang at the theatre the night of her accident, as Mme. Merlin affirms. But, although the exact date of it is unknown, it is absolutely certain that it happened before the end of her engagement at Drury Lane, and that, in spite of the pain, she went on with her performances and finished them. The last was on July 23, when she played one act of *La Sonnambula*, one act of the *Maid of Artois*, and closed proceedings, it is said, by singing *God Save the King*, thus putting the last touch to the public enthusiasm.

Next day husband and wife left London to return to Brussels. But no one who knew what she was would imagine that Mme. Malibran would consider taking such precautions as her health exacted, or, at least, have the rest which she urgently required. So she and her husband were to be seen some weeks later giving a concert at Liège, Aix-la-Chapelle (where they appeared twice), travelling into France to stay there a few days, and then returning to England to take part in the great Manchester Festival, which was to mark the last event in her career and in her life, the last time her voice was heard.

And, to give some idea of a charm which this lovable woman still and always had,

despite all troubles, I need only copy the letter she wrote to her good friend the Marquess de Louvois, immediately on arriving in Belgium:—

"*26th July*, 1836. BRUSSELS.

"Oh! you most wicked and faithless of men! There you are, making our mouths water with expectation, and then fiddle-dee-dee! Nothing more's to be known or heard of père Louvois. You know what I am saying is true; and if you do not come with the next post to see us at Brussels, I'll never talk to you again in my life, and will cut you dead: it will cut me also to the quick, but I'll do the cutting all the same.

"We stop here until the 14th—*i. e.* on the 14th there will be a concert at Liège, where we play and warble. To-day is the 28th, and you can therefore spend from ten to twelve, fourteen or sixteen days with us. That is the very least which père Louvois could do to contribute to his adoptive children's happiness without, at the same time, doing any injustice to little Jules. He must be a duck of a boy now he's bigger, more perky and spry and wiser. Tell him I haven't forgotten him, and I hope his generosity is genuine, that he always tells the truth, and always keeps his hands and nails clean.

"Do you remember Venice? How is my *Bédit Vranzoi*[1] and our dear M——? Have you seen M.? Have you seen M. Guis? He was down in the dumps at leaving London without seeing you, and had told me to remember him to you in most affectionate terms. So there's my commission done, though I was enjoined to do it personally. Is M. Beer in France? Tell him I shall not forget his delightful evening party at Naples and his kindness to us.

"Whilst at London I met M. and Mme. C——n; but they hardly recognized me; besides they would have come down a peg in the good opinion of high society (especially in that of the Duke of Devonshire, at whose house I met them again for the first time), if any one had believed that they, M. and Mme. C——n, had deigned to come and spend an amusing evening with me at Venice. Certain people can only be condescended to, when they can amuse; apart from that you are—I mean, I am—a distant speck in perspective, visible but from afar.

"I own I was idiot enough to mind this change of attitude, which was all the more absurd because when they came to see me and

[1] *Petit François*, German-French.

'received' me, the municipality and the mayor had not yet become acquainted with that formidable *yes* in the play, which enlivened the audience on that day when your testimonial increased my happiness by ten degrees.

"I have had no news of that good old Mme. L——, and very much want to hear something about her: also of Minfild: please send me some; please do. Charles is almost blind, and therefore cannot write: he directs me to tell you that he supports with all the weight of his body my request to you to start sooner even than at once.

"Good-bye, my father, I am sending you my kisses.

"Maria de Bériot."

This letter shows that on August 14 Mme. Malibran and her husband went to Liège to give a concert, in which, they say, her younger sister Pauline took part, who was then fifteen years old (and later on became Mme. Viardot). Immediately after Mme. Malibran left for Aix-la-Chapelle, where she was due for two performances and one concert. The King of Prussia[1] felt very much flattered at this first visit that the famous artist was paying to his dominions,

[1] Frederick William III.

and rendered her an exceptional tribute : according to a paper, "By order of the King of Prussia, the guard presented arms when Mme. de Bériot left the theatre, and gave her royal honours."

Then she went to Paris, and spent a few days at a large estate she had bought at Rosny, and she there gathered round her some of her intimate friends. But she could not stay for long : her rest was cut short by her engagement to sing at the Manchester Festival on September 12, 13 and 14. But her health was unsteady since her terrible fall in London, and she was in greater pain than she would admit for fear of disquieting her husband : her temper suffered under the strain, and she would, spasmodically and without reason, be now madly frivolous, and, instantly after, utterly dejected and melancholic. But she bore her pain stoically ; and moreover, pushed the virtue of courage to the pitch of recklessness, a kind of heroism, and would not break off for one minute the life of whirling and tireless activity which she had been leading for years. Manchester, where she was now going, was nothing more to her than a stage in this eternal tour, the ceaseless hop-skip-and-jump of her existence. After this festival she was to go on at once to the three

gatherings at Norwich, Liverpool and Worcester (as de Bériot said in his letter), and then to embark on a huge progress in Scotland and Ireland. She might be said to be racing to her death.[1]

[1] Over-exertion was, apparently, the indispensable mainspring of Mme. Malibran's temperament. On this aspect Countess Merlin writes : " Aversion from leisure and abstract contemplation was one of the most marked characteristics of this strange woman. She was always in motion : when she left the theatre, after a rehearsal or performance of an entire opera, she would start jumping over the furniture, try experiments in agility or skill, try to balance in various postures, until she fell down exhausted with fatigue and could not stir. If her husband or her friends represented to her what must ensue from such bravado, she would say : ' No, you're wrong : you don't know me ; I cannot decide on resting beforehand : it must come of itself perforce from overexertion. I cannot economize my energy ; I must use all my life up as far as I can, else I should stifle.' "

CHAPTER XIII

Arrives at Manchester—Despite pain sings fourteen songs at first festival, next day morning and evening and following day—Falls, after heroic effort, never to rise again—Illness and death—Manchester's astounding claim to her body—De Bériot brings action—Mme. Garcia obtains her daughter's body and takes it back to Belgium—Interment at Brussels.

MADAME MALIBRAN and her husband duly left Paris so as to arrive at Manchester on the eve of the first day of the Manchester Festival (which was, I believe, to last four days). Once she arrived, matters moved forward with most unexpected and cruel pace. Her condition, when she reached Manchester, was very weak and nervous; she was exhausted by the long journey, which this time had tried her especially hard, but without affording any sign of what was to come about. But, all the same, she would sing on the night of the 12th, and lavish her little strength by taking part in no less than fourteen pieces,[1] and on the 13th she sang twice, once at the church in the morning, and in the evening at the theatre: on the 14th,

[1] Sir George Grove, *Dictionary of Music and Musicians.*

again, she exerted herself with might and main, and yielded to the persistence of the public enthusiasm, at the cost of a superhuman effort, so far as to perform a duet with Mme. Caradori-Allan, the effect of which was beyond words wonderful. But, as she foresaw, this last heroic feat was too much for her; she could only stagger back into the wings, fell down in a faint, and, after first help had been rendered, had to be carried home. She was never to be heard or seen again. Nine days later, on September 23, in the summer of her life, with all the halo of world-wide and uncontested glory, she departed from the world she had enchanted, leaving behind the memory of an artist such as had never been dreamed of before.[1]

Whilst supplementing them from some other sources, I shall borrow from a very authoritative article in the *Monde dramatique* exact particulars, which are full of interest, bearing on the sad event, which may be said to have made all Europe mourn, more than if the greatest prince had died:—

"Yes: it is true; Mme. Malibran is dead. She in whom was the blitheness of Rosina,

[1] I have already observed (p. 227) that Mme. Malibran's death happened on the anniversary of Bellini's.

the vigour of Desdemona, and the queenliness of Semiramis, is dead to all her friends and for all the arts. The celebrated *prima donna* has been lifted away from the scene where she gave us delight, and aroused our cheers, and stirred our sympathies. And she was only twenty-eight years old.

"News of this sad event reached us yesterday from all parts of England. She died at Manchester on September 23, of what science calls *hysteralgia*, accompanied with over-excitement of the brain, *i.e.* a nervous affection which causes senseless laughter and tears.

"Mme. Malibran, though she was in an advanced stage of pregnancy, had consented to sing at the great Manchester Festival, where Lablache, Ivanof, Phillips, Mme. Caradori, Mme. Assandri, and all the singers and instrumentalists of modern note were to play.

"On arriving at the commercial capital, Mme. Malibran inquired at which hotel Lablache would be stopping, in order to enjoy his society during her stay; the proprietor of the Royal Hotel had anticipated her, and, eager for the honour of lodging the great singer, he assured her that the famous *buffo* would soon be there, and she should have him as a neighbour; but Lablache had already

settled down at the Mosley Arms, where Mme. Malibran hastened to go and meet him."

As has been said, the day after her arrival, the first of the festival, Mme. Malibran sang no less than fourteen pieces; and, to hold out against the fatigue of the second day, had to use an astonishing force of will, playing at two concerts: but nature told in the end, her strength was sapped, and she fainted after every piece.

"On the 14th [the *Monde dramatique* continues] spasmodic symptoms of a more pronounced type became more and more frequent: she would laugh and cry without any power of self-control; at the evening concert some foreboding of the end was already in the air, and preluded her entry. The very alacrity of the public and the orchestra had something in it of the dreary solemnity of a last farewell. At this gigantic concert no one dared be in default; the artists playing were in all one hundred and six, every one of them players of the greatest merit; the choir consisted of one hundred and thirty-four; and in the orchestra were forty members of the Philharmonic Society. In the galleries there were over three thousand: eight hundred seats had

been sold at a guinea each. It was a sublime sight; but an atmosphere of gloom.

"The Coronation Anthem, the *Creation* of Haydn, were admirably rendered, as also Mozart's *Requiem*. Mme. Malibran was to come on next with a song from Händel's *Redemption*, and appeared after a long wait. Her pallour was noticeable: she looked weak and nervous. But, her voice regained its usual breadth; only, after singing Cimarosa's air in the *Sacrifice of Abraham*, her strength gave way. The wonderful singer had wished to give a proof of her willingness; and she was paying dear for her rewards, for she was very ill. For all this, she plucked up courage and sang in the quatuor of *Fidelio*, and consented to take her share in a duet with Mme. Caradori-Allan. It was divinely sung, and encored by all present."

This duet, then much in vogue, was the one in Mercadante's *Andronico: Vanne, se alberghi in petto.* But the writer in the *Monde dramatique* no doubt did not know of the dramatic incident—or else he would have mentioned it,—which the public enthusiasm at this point was the ignorant cause; for the audience had been moved as one man by the marvellous

singing of this piece, and were madly calling for an encore. Mme. Malibran was at the end of her tether, was pale, panting, exhausted—in all save her courage, as we shall see—and, in vain, made appealing gestures for mercy: the clamour went on. So she turned to the conductor, the celebrated Sir George Smart, and said, "If I go on again, it will be the death of me." "Then, madam," Sir George replied, "you need only withdraw, and I will apologize to the audience." But she rallied at these words, as though stung by an insult, and, with her usual energy, said resolutely, "No, I will sing, but it means the death of me." What frightful effort of a supreme courage was it that carried her though to the bitter end of a second piece? No one can say. But, whilst the house was quaking amid the wild thunders of applause, the unhappy victor was hardly off the stage before she fell in a dead faint in Mme. Caradori-Allan's arms and was taken to the *foyer* in all haste.

At this point I take up once more the precise account in the *Monde dramatique*:—

"The members of the committee were frightened, and sent for an English doctor, who ordered her to be bled. Lablache was present.

He knew Mme. Malibran's temperament, and insisted that the operation should not take place: the patient translated his words to the doctor, who replied, 'Tell M. Lablache to look after his singing, and not to go about doctoring.' And she was bled.

"When it was over, she was too weak to bear the motion of the carriage, which was to have carried her from the theatre to her hotel; she was laid on a stretcher, and taken to the Mosley Arms. She was in such agony that her moans could be heard all over the hotel. During the night she became violently delirious, and at those periods called Lablache, no doubt recollecting his advice not to have her bled.

"From this time forward the patient grew steadily worse; M. de Bériot, who was in the greatest distress, yielded to his wife's request and sent for Doctor Bellomini,[1] in whom she felt the greatest confidence. He arrived on Sunday 18th, and instantly took remedial measures; but it was no good: delirium came back at intervals, and more violently than ever. On Tuesday 20th she was put into an arm-chair to have her bed made up. This effort

[1] He himself spelt his name Belluomini. *Vide* Section VI of Appendix, p. 314.

tired her exceedingly, and for the greater part of the afternoon she remained silent and motionless. At eleven o'clock, the glad news was spread that she was better, the cough less insistent, and the fever sunk. However, as things were, it was obvious she would not be able to take part in the musical festivals at Norwich and Worcester, as she was so feeble that the doctors, even admitting a speedy convalescence, said they could not allow the famous singer to take part in the musical festival, a fortnight thence at Liverpool.

"On Thursday Lablache, just before leaving Norwich to keep his engagement at Paris, together with Mme. Assandri, and Ivanof, received a letter from de Bériot saying that his wife was much better, out of danger, and the illness was caused by a premature labour. Ivanof was overjoyed at the news, and bought a finely wrought tobacco-pouch to present to the doctor who had saved the life of the *diva*. But, whilst they on their side were giving themselves over to the hopes of a recovery, at Manchester all signs of life were disappearing.

"Things being now in this extremity, Doctor Bellomini thought it advisable to summon Mr. Lewis, the most able surgeon in London, to have a consultation, and to share the

responsibility. Lewis, after seeing the patient's insensibility, and the slow movement of the pulse, declared that every hope was gone. They say Doctor Bellomini asked the famous doctor if he thought Mme. Malibran's pregnancy had materially affected her illness. Lewis said he did not, as it was not far enough advanced. From that time onwards, Mme. Malibran remained in a condition of torpor and unconsciousness; and only revived once to take a glass of barley water from her husband's hands. At last the fatal hour came, only awaited too long. She drew her last breath at 12.20,[1] without having had one moment of consciousness during all her long agony."

The whole city of Manchester had been

[1] The English documents say twenty "before" twelve. In translation probably the *moins* in "minuit *moins* vingt" was omitted in the copy or the proof. The point is important, as altering the date of her death.

One curious fact may be noted. The great singer's first husband, the former banker, Eugène Malibran (whose name through her became famous), died at Paris six weeks after her.

The *Gazette muzicale* announced his death in its issue of November 20, 1836, with this strange editorial note: "M. Malibran, who had the *honour* of lending his name to the celebrated singer whose loss we deplore, but did not have the *good fortune* of *keeping the honour for himself*, has just died at Paris."

moved by the events on the 14th, and was deeply concerned in the state of the precious invalid, though no one suspected how serious matters were. A harrowing anxiety came over everyone's spirit on reading the bulletins in the morning paper signed and published by the doctors. Then it became a matter of honour who should go and sign the visitors' book at the hotel and ask for news. And the whole town seemed to be in mourning when the end came, so great was the admiration of the artist, the affection for the woman, so general was the love she inspired, the sympathy she aroused.

It is needless to speak of the grief felt by de Bériot. "When Mme. Malibran had breathed her last," says the *Monde dramatique*, "it was at first thought that M. de Bériot might spend the rest of the night at the hotel; but he was in so great despair that it was apprehended his terrible condition might be aggravated if he were left in that funereal place. So Doctor Bellomini dragged him off in a coach, which set out for London."

From London, apparently, he was taken off to Brussels. At this point we must interpose one unhappy and singular incident, the details of which are rather obscure; the case of a city,

obstinately, despite the justest claims, keeping the body of a woman who was a stranger, and refusing it even to her husband. But we said at the beginning there would never be anything ordinary in Mme. Malibran's life, or even in her death. Thus the city of Manchester, in the absence of any representative of her family, took on itself to celebrate the funeral of the famous musician with great pomp, and to inter her remains in the south aisle of the Collegiate Church.[1] These obsequies took place in spite of de Bériot's protests, which, though incontrovertibly right, were fruitless. We saw, that, at once after his wife's death he had been forced back to London, and then to Brussels, by Doctor Bellomini. It must have been from Brussels that he tried to reclaim from Manchester—but how and in what way I do not know—his poor mortal remains, which he wished to bury at Brussels. But it is really very strange that the civil and religious authorities of Manchester refused his request point blank, notwithstanding his claim as the husband; and this negative was so absolute that he had no recourse but to go to law to get his right. And then the queer sight was seen of the citizens of Manchester all leagued

[1] Now the Cathedral.

together, and encouraging their agents to stand up for this wild claim to keep the body of an artist who had chanced by her death whilst in their city, on any grounds they could put up. Fantastic as this all sounds, it is all true, and one last quotation from the *Monde dramatique* will disclose a curious incident in this strange story :—

"The matter of the exhumation of Mme. Malibran is becoming more complicated in many remarkable ways. On Monday a deputation of twelve members waited on the Warden and Fellows of the College at Manchester, and presented a petition signed by seven hundred well-known citizens of that town. This petition requested these gentlemen to oppose the exhumation; first, because the ground in which the remains of the singer are laid to rest belongs to the Collegiate Church, and is outside the jurisdiction of the Ordinary (the Bishop of Chester); secondly, *because the first marriage of Mlle. Garcia with M. Malibran had never been legally dissolved, and she could not contract a second valid marriage with M. de Bériot.* If this second ground were maintained, he could have no authority on which to support his action. The

Warden replied to the deputation and said he and his colleagues would take the petition into their earnest consideration; and, if they approved it, would exert all of their influence to oppose the exhumation, both in the Court of the Metropolitan of York (where the case is being tried) and in any other lawful way."

Thus, to conserve the remains of a famous woman and satisfy their pride, the good citizens of Manchester found no better means at hand than to vilify her. In the defence of their case, there is a singularly immoral spring of action, which renders their hateful pretensions all the more odious.

The fact remains, that, in spite of the law-suit, they went on with the funeral; only they refrained, I believe, from absolute burial. The body was simply deposited in a vault belonging to the Collegiate Church. But even then de Bériot might not have succeeded in overcoming his difficulties if Mme. Garcia, whose grief was also intense enough, had not come to his aid, and decided to go to Manchester personally, not to support his claims, but to substantiate them in her name. The voyage even might have proved fatal to her. There was no time to lose, and Mme. Garcia embarked at Antwerp,

not, as far as I can see, on one of the regular packets engaged in passenger service to England (sailings were less frequent than now), but on a ship expressly chartered by her for the purpose. The season of the year was unpropitious, and the ship during the crossing met with a frightful storm and nearly foundered near Flushing. But Mme. Garcia landed hale and safe on the English coast, hurried up to Manchester, and at last secured what even the Consul had failed of; for English law could not refuse a daughter's body to the mother. Then the body was exhumed, and taken back by her to Brussels.

It was determined that the definite obsequies of Mme. Malibran de Bériot should take place at the God's-acre of Laeken, some few kilometres out of Brussels. These solemn rites at the second interment were very touching. We quote this account from a paper :—

"The vestibule and the drawing-room of M. de Bériot's house at the top of the Faubourg de Namur had been arranged as a *chapelle ardente* to receive the body on its arrival from Antwerp. Some days M. de Bériot had left the house, and was staying with one of his uncles.

"Sunday evening the mortal remains of the

marvellous singer arrived at Ixelles. The leaden coffin enclosed in another of oak, and draped in black, had been deposited on a catafalque in the middle of the room, which was hung all round in black, and lighted from a chandelier and a plenteous ring of wax-tapers. On the coffin was a silver escutcheon bearing the legend: *Marie-Félicité Garcia, the wife of de Bériot; died at the age of twenty-eight.*

"At eleven o'clock the Harmonic Society of Ixelles (of which M. de Bériot is the president), La Société de la Grande Harmonie de Bruxelles and the excellent band of the regiment of the Guides du Roi,[1] were mustered at the mortuary house, as also a large number of persons who had come to render a last homage to the famous artist and kindly woman, who carried away with her to her tomb sorrow so well justified and so world-wide. At half-past eleven the coffin was placed on a hearse drawn by four horses, and the procession set forth in the following order: the drums of the Eighth Regiment of Infantry; the Harmonic Society of Ixelles, with its banner veiled with crape; the Société de la Grande Harmonie de Bruxelles, also in mourning; the band of the regiment of the Guides;[1] the hearse, the cords of which were borne by

[1] Equivalent to the Horse Guards.

MM. Blargnies, a councillor of the Court of Appeal, A. de Peellaert, the composer, Geefs, the sculptor, and Narvez, the historian, in front; and in the rear by M. Fétis, the director of the Royal Conservatoire, A. Baron, the writer, Suys, the architect, and Renard, a member of the Théâtre Royal. Behind the hearse there marched the pupils of the Conservatoire, the artists from the city theatres and the guests invited.

"As it wound its way along the procession was joined by an immense crowd; and, in spite of the mud on the roads leading to Laeken, it was very numerous on its arrival at the cemetery. During the whole of the route the different bands played funeral marches by turns. Many houses were draped in black. We especially noted the Hôtel d'Angleterre and the office of the Société de la Grande Harmonie.

"After a slow and melancholy march, the procession reached Laeken at half-past one. The church-door was shut, but a porch draped in black had been put up at the entrance of the burial-ground, and the body was received to the tolling of the bells. Many ladies had come to the cemetery in advance.

"The coffin was carried by hand to the opening of the vault, on which the monu-

ment was to be reared, a *miserere* was well sung by the pupils of the Conservatoire and the singers of the City Theatre, in four parts unaccompanied, under M. Fétis' directions; then two discourses were delivered, one by M. Fétis, and the other by M. Baron. Both were well written and well thought out, and were generously applauded.

"Then the ceremony came to an end, which will not soon be forgotten in the city of Brussels. The whole population had been keenly interested to get the mortal remains of Mme. Malibran restored to the city of which the matchless singer had become a citizen."

Τετέλεσται.

CHAPTER XIV

Her genius—Contemporary judgment — The artist and the woman.

What hast thou done to die, thou the most bless'd,
God's fairest form, who, passing by, did'st shed
Joy on the rich and gav'st the poor man bread?
Who durst thus smite our mother Nature's breast,
And her, who was our greatest and our best,
What blinded starveling robber dared strike dead? . . .

We wail o'er thy untimely tomb, and rue
More than thy art divine, or secret lore,
On which—'twas all thine own—let others pore.
Thy soul, Ninette, a child's, so great and true,
Thy heart's voice which alone could thrill all through
Our hearts ; all this is stilled for evermore.

THUS did de Musset, the great poet of passion, paint the passionate genius of Mme. Malibran.[1] He was right and inspired when he wrote: "Ce qui'l nous faut pleurer . . . c'est ton âme, Ninette . . . que nulle autre, après toi, ne nous rendra jamais."[2] For it was that fiery

[1] It is well known that de Musset's lines to Mme. Malibran (to be found among his volume *Premières Poésies*) were first published in vol. viii of the *Revue des deux Mondes*, in 1836, a few days after the wonderful singer's death.

[2] Ninetta is the character in *La Gazza Ladra*, a play in which Mme. Malibran especially surpassed herself.

soul that burst out into scorching pathos, in woeful tones, that even tore the heart, a soul with such power of emotion that she could inspire in turn horror, pity, terror, compassion, bring tears from the most callous—this was what was admirable in Mme. Malibran, what made her more than a great artist and rendered her unique, peerless and unequalled, an ideal thenceforward unapproachable. More than once, to describe her artistic nature and temperament, I have used the word "genius," a word which seems out of place in connection with merely the art of interpretation, however great the warmth and the value of the rendering. But with Mme. Malibran it was always original creation, inspiration and inventiveness in her manner of translating other's thoughts: in portraying what others had written, she delved from the depths of that heart of hers, that beat so fast, so aflame with emotion, notes so individual and unexpected, that she increased her matter tenfold, and invested it with absolute newness. Cannot this be called the essence of genius? Further, Rossini, who knew what he was talking about, and called her "Nature's spoiled child," also said to have genius.[1]

[1] Rossini used to say: "Many of the singers of my time have been great artists: many admirable, or matchless even

This quality it is that has cast a kind of legendary halo round the poetical and sublime figure of Mme. Malibran. It was not merely her admitted superiority in every respect over all contemporary operatic singers: this supereminence was something utterly apart and different; she was so exceptional that comparison was incongruous, and her art something distinct from theirs. Hers was, certainly, no paltry triumph over mediocrities: for there were great artists in the group of the famous singers, such as Henriette Sontag, Carolina Ungher, Pasta, Grisi, Méric-Lalande, Pisaroni, Mombelli, Schoberlechner, Caradori-Allan, Camporesi, Morandi, Schröder-Devrient, Boccabadati, Tosi, Ronzi de Begnis. Yet, however glorious their names, they all pale and are eclipsed by the splendour of that of Mme. Malibran. The fascination this versatile artist exercised over all who knew her is only equalled by the hold which another no less extraordinary artist in a different medium had on

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in their kind; but there were only three real geniuses: *il papà Lablache*, his pet child, the real *Rubini del Canto*, *il caro Giovan Battista* (the Christian names of Rubini), and that spoiled child of Nature, Maria Felicità Malibran."—Francesco Florimo, *Cenni storici sulla scuola musicale di Napoli.*

his time for the same reason; his memory has also become legendary. Paganini and Malibran, those two irreproducible beings, the fact of whose existence is a kind of double challenge hurled at human nature.

Taking her from a purely musical point of view, Mme. Malibran possessed all the qualities natural and acquired one could demand of a singer. Castil-Blaze says: "The voice of Mme. Malibran vibrated full of vividness and vigour, without even forfeiting the seductive, velvety tone, which enhanced it with so much ingratiating force in tender and passionate passages. She burst out like a thunderbolt in the last duet of *Otello*, after sobbing through the romance, and quieting down in the prayer to a pianissimo which might have been taken for utter stillness, had not the whole house been subdued into a rapture of moveless admiration. Her voice went up from the lower 'g' of the contralto to the upper 'e' of the soprano. Liveliness, the right touch, confidence and boldness, dazzling effects of strength, grace or playfulness, mastery of chromatics up and down, trills, jumps of octaves, twelfths, fifteenths, arpeggios, all that art could buy, was hers by right. Like Lablache or Rossini, a musician in reading or diction, she was a fair composer,

and could write passing pieces of delightful taste, elegant form and original melody. Such a singer would find no trouble in inventing embroideries, pauses, and all the decorations she scattered lavishly in her concert pieces. When she was to do them in a solo, she would not trouble to think them out: she could trust to her inspiration, which always served her marvellously well. But she would combine and note down points in her duets: we all recollect the pauses Mme. Malibran inserted in the three duets in *Tancredi:* she put in the best of them with Mlle. Sontag, and the tradition of them has remained."[1]

But this musical talent was only part of the equipment of Mme. Malibran; her dramatic sense, her theatrical knowledge were as great and presented no less originality and variety, and were so closely linked up with the vocal powers that the union of the two produced the composite effect of grandeur and harmony which aroused everyone's astonishment and admiration. "She is as great a tragedian as Talma, as great a comic actor as Lablache," said a contemporary critic.[2] And this is not the whole of the tale. Her artistic personality was com-

[1] *Revue de Paris*, 1836.
[2] Fayolle, *Biographie Michaud.*

plemented by the woman's charm, her overpowering grace, and the poetic and ideal countenance, which Théophile Gautier thus described: "A spread of black hair rolling down, a pale cheek resting on a transparent hand, a throbbing harp, an eye shining with the lustre of tears."

The summing up of her dramatic talent in a line by a contemporary critic has just been quoted, "As great a tragedian as Talma, as great a comic actor as Lablache," and very well completes what Castil-Blaze wrote from an entirely musical point of view. There is a great deal wrapped up in these few words, enough to explain her unassailable ascendancy over her audience, the amazing variety of feelings with which she could impress them, and her mastery in every department. Whether she wore the cuirass of Tancred, the doublet of Romeo, Desdemona's long white robe, the skittish skirt of Rosina or Suzanna, or even the laughable headgear of the old maid Fidalma, it was always herself beneath, *i. e.* that supremeness inseparable from her performances; but it also was always a true and perfect interpretation of the character in all its essence, its personality, with every trick of gait and mien. In tragedy she wrought terror almost; in comedy she

was funny or even burlesque, without ever caricaturing. And then add to all this all the subtleties in pathetic parts, in tender and graceful rôles, whether in scenes comic or merry.[1]

Yet there are some great artists who have never understood her. Such was Eugène Delacroix, who in his recently published *Diary* protests against the glory of Mme. Malibran, against her idolization, with that peculiar venom so usual with him. One day, about twenty years after her death, he was spending an evening with her brother, Manuel Garcia, and the conversation turned on what an actor's talents and qualities should be. He tells his story thus :—

"Garcia, in defending the side of sensitiveness and true passion, was thinking of his sister, Mme. Malibran. He told us, as a proof of her

[1] One Italian critic said : "Maria Malibran was the real incarnation of art ; the most perfect type that has ever been seen in that sphere ; she lacked not one attribute ; and the pinnacle she climbed to, by dint of work and genius, has never been attained, even partially, by any other artist. Her eye, her face, her movements, the warm-hearted and vigorous action, made her a model for dramatic actors, whilst her extraordinary voice, her marvellous aptitude in song, and her experience in overcoming every difficulty made all her rivals vie to imitate her."

great powers as an actress, that she never knew how she acted. Thus as Romeo, when she arrived at Juliet's tomb, she would sometimes stop and lean against a pillar, in an attitude of utter dejection, or throw herself in an agony of sobs on the stone, and so forth ; thus she gained effects which were very energetic and truthful, but she also exaggerated and deformed her play, and made it unbearable. I do not recollect ever seeing her *dignified.* The very nearest she got to sublimity was what a middle-class imagination would attain ; in a word, *she was altogether lacking in ideal* (!!!) She was like all gifted young folk, whose bubbling notions and inexperience convince them they cannot overdo things ; apparently she was always looking out for novel effects in a situation. Once start this way and there's no end to it ; it is not the fashion of a consummate talent, which, once the study is over, and the point ascertained, does not veer. . . . That was the secret of Mme. Pasta's talent. This was what Rubens, Raphaël and all the great composers did. Besides, in the other style, the mind is in a perpetual whirl, and life is spent in working out the possibilities of one subject. When Mme. Malibran had come to the end of her night's performance, she was exhausted ; mental fatigue was added on to

physical, and her brother agrees, she could not have survived this course of life for long."[1]

Delacroix made the mistake of comparing two arts which are utterly dissimilar, that of the painter and the actor, the means of production being quite different. But, even thus, in blaming Mme. Malibran for the variety of her interpretations of the same part, he did not notice he was impugning two other great artists who had the public enthusiasm behind them all through their careers, Talma and Frédérik Lemaître, who also never played the same part twice over in the same way, and were also guided by the inspiration of the moment. This very fact, which Delacroix criticizes, was one of the vital features of Mme. Malibran's genius. He prefers Mme. Pasta, a noble and pure actress, but cold and formal, and certainly always the same. Mme. Pasta was always before the footlights; Mme. Malibran forgot she was in front of an audience: as de Musset says in this stanza:—

> Why did'st thou never turn and face the throng
> Smiling, as others use, who feign their woe?
> —None would have seen it, for they loved thee so.—
> Why wast thou frenzied in the willow-song,
> Not anxious if thy pose were right or wrong?
> *As Pasta walked, why should'st thou fear to go?*

[1] *Journal d'Eugène Delacroix* (January 26, 1847, vol. i, pp. 247–250).

De Musset's scorn evidently is directly the opposite of Delacroix's. The variety and spontaneity of Mme. Malibran's playing, which the great painter decries almost bitterly, were, really, one of her great resources, and have been properly lauded by other writers. I am going to quote a good instance, all the more interesting because a different comparison will be found from the one instituted by Delacroix, dealing with Mme. Malibran's and Mme. Pasta's scenic action :—[1]

"Those who have known both singers will readily understand the new vogue which was given to Bellini's work by Garcia's great daughter. No doubt, Mme. Pasta was a great artist; she had a classic and regular beauty, her talents and her personality harmonized completely. In her, everything was pure, formal, linked up, and settled in advance. Once she had learned her part and determined on the effects, she might improve on them every day with some finishing touch of observa-

[1] These lines are taken from a *Study on Bellini* read at a public session of the Marseilles Academy on May 22, 1853, and published in the *Revue méridionale.* The writer, Gustave Bénédit, had known Mme. Malibran well, had been trained at the Paris Conservatoire, and was professor of singing at the Marseilles Conservatoire, and musical critic to *Le Sémaphore.*

tion or style; with that nice toil in which patience replaces inspiration. But the outcome of Mme. Pasta's vocal or dramatic execution was always foreseen; fine but not uniformly fine. Mme. Malibran went just the other way; she was not what one would usually call a handsome woman: her face was very pale, and her irregular features presented nothing striking at the first glance. But, under this frail and modest exterior, there lay concealed a soul so fiery and passionate as God perhaps had never before created. She would begin her part like a mere mortal, quite simply, did not try to make any artificial impression; then, as the action developed, or a moving or tragic situation came up in the drama, the singer's face would light up, and her eyes reflect an indefinable expression, and her voice, with its magnificent volume and huge range, would produce unimaginable effects.

"What artists admired most of all in Mme. Malibran was the *unforeseen*. One could never make any programme of how she would render a part. Her singing and her action changed from day to day, and to know her thoroughly, the only thing would have been to have seen every performance of hers. And, then, why not admit it? the talent of this

famous professional singer, as that of Mme. Dorval, whence it came, was unequal and a commonplace gift (if you will excuse the expression). It might happen, in consequence of some unpleasant incident or annoyance off the stage, the artist forgot her fictive part, and remained immersed in real life, and under the spell of these thoughts alien to her rôle, was subject to the ways of common humanity. But at last her hot temper revolted against the invisible force which was repressing her flight within the circle of vulgar passions, and hindering her from thrilling the impatient crowd. That was the time to see Mme. Malibran. She seemed to come out of a dream. No doubt, humiliated in her own eyes by having played for so long on earth, she seemed to shudder all over nervously, and the actress vanished, giving place to a supernatural and non-terrestrial being. Then the public, carried away, despite themselves, by this supreme interpreter, became motionless, and could hardly breathe. They felt the time was approaching for one of those lightning effects, which rouse the audience. That moment came, and the pythoness, with one gesture, and one look, swayed the house and transformed it, strangled it, broke it in the burst of her sovereign inspiration."

Up to now, the writer has talked only generalities. What follows illustrates one of those sudden outbursts of inspiration, in which Mme. Malibran was so expert, one of those unexpected developments, or, rather, one of those dramatic discoveries, which hit the mark without aiming at it, and are the natural ebullition of the artist's temperament: this instance is based on fact:—

"Lablache, that powerful actor, with his Herculean proportions, was playing the bailiff's part in *La Gazza Ladra*, owned he barely escaped from Mme. Malibran's grip, in the second act, where in the prison scene she rejects his hateful avowal of love. Lablache had never seen anything so terribly true to life as this dramatic movement. In the first act of this opera, Mme. Malibran arrives one evening and sings her *cavatina* excellently. In the following scene, Philip, her betrothed, is announced—a young soldier who has been away for some years. Philip is not yet near the farm, but can be seen on a hillock that overhangs the village. Until this day, Mme. Malibran, who had played as Ninetta over twenty times in Italy, had always rushed with the crowd of peasants to meet her betrothed,

and the public thought she had already come out of the wings, when they saw her standing on the table to the left of the stage, her hands in the air, waving a handkerchief and her face glowing with happiness at seeing her lover approach. How had she got there? Nobody knew. The table was isolated. There were no chairs round it. Mere inspiration had made her clear two feet at a jump, and so quickly was this done, that no one had observed it."

But I must now return to Delacroix, who, in spite of his great intelligence, was not able to understand Mme. Malibran, in fact, quite misrepresented her, a fact the more strange when we consider that the impulsive and sometimes disorderly genius of the painter would have seemed congenial with the passionate strength of the singer. But we have him pleading for tranquillity and uniformity in art, so far as she is concerned, and himself painting the *Massacre of Scio*, the *Madness of Medea*, yet reproving her as Desdemona, Norma and Semiramis, and all of her dramatic outbursts and grand transports. Whatever the explanation, this is what he says of her :—

"As Mary Queen of Scots in *Marie Stuart*, she is brought into the presence of her rival,

Elizabeth, by Leicester, who implores her to degrade herself by kneeling. At last she consents, and falling on her knees, she does beg of Elizabeth in good earnest ; and then, stung by Elizabeth's inexorability, she used to rise up pettishly and give full reins to a fit of fury, which, so Garcia says, was always most effective. She would tear her handkerchief to pieces, and even her gloves : this is a device no really great artist would condescend to. Such players carry the boxes by storm and create an ephemeral fame out of those who know no better."

Would Delacroix have wished to see Hermoine or Athalie[1] played like Célimène or Elmire?[2] But to go on :

" An actor's talent is at a disadvantage in that after his death no comparison can be made between him and his rivals whilst he was alive. All that posterity knows of an actor is his contemporary reputation ; and, to our children, Mme. Malibran will be placed as high as Mme. Pasta, or even exalted above her, to go by the panegyrics of her period. Garcia, speaking of Mme. Pasta, classed her among the cold and formal school, the *plastics*, as he said. But, instead of plasticism, he should

[1] Characters in *Racine.* [2] Characters in *Molière.*

have said the ideal. At Milan she created the rôle of Norma most brilliantly; there was no more talk of Pasta, only of Norma; then Mme. Malibran followed her, and decided to start in this character—*this childishness went off very well.* The audience was at first uncertain, then deified her, and Mme. Pasta was forgotten. Mme. Malibran had become *Norma*, and I can readily believe it. People of scant education and poor taste—unluckily, these form the great majority—will always cast their votes for acting like that of Mme. Malibran."

With all due respect for Delacroix, when poets like de Musset and Théophile Gautier, masters like Rossini and Bellini, singers like Lablache and Nourrit, critics like Fétis and Castil-Blaze, music-lovers like Vitet and others, are all enthusiastic admirers of Mme. Malibran, it is a little unfortunate to speak of people of "scant education and poor taste." Whatever disdain one may feel for public favour, when an artist is acclaimed on all sides, in all countries, in France, Italy, Belgium and England, when everywhere she excites enthusiasm and provokes tears, when the admiration of her overran its bounds, and appeared in every imaginable shape, it is also a little foolish to speak of the idiocy and sottishness of the public. Otherwise, all

emotion is chimeric, tears are all pretence, and art is a mere lie, a will-o'-the-wisp and illusion![1]

Nor did the veneration for her die with her. It appeared in many forms, sometimes touchingly, sometimes peculiarly, as two obscure facts I shall state will show.

On January 1, 1837, the Paris Théâtre du Palais Royal was giving the first production of a review of 1836, "*The Year 1836 in the Witness-box*," by Théaulon, Bayard and Frédéric de Courcy. The main parts of this review were taken by M. Sainville, a jolly actor whose reputation for conviviality is not yet forgotten, and the charming Virginie Déjazet, who, as usual, appeared in a make-up, as the Postillion of Longjumeau, and was one of the great hits of the year. The two exchanged endless sallies

[1] I was citing Nourrit. He was a friend of Mme. Malibran from her childhood, had been with her at her father's school, and very greatly admired her gifts. Mme. Nourrit, who was at Naples in 1838 with her husband, writing to a friend, says: "Naples seems full of reminiscences of Mme. Malibran. Her portrait is to be seen in nearly every house, and I, who am in furnished apartments, have a bust of her in front of me . . ." (V. Quicherat, *Adolphe Nourrit, sa vie, son talent*, etc.) But to return to Delacroix, does any one remember that he could not endure David d'Angers, nor ever understand his strong masculine genius. These are strange aberrations for an artist of such a virile temper.

whilst they watched the personified events of any consequence of the past twelve months pass in file in front of them, as well as the persons who had been in the public eye. Mme. Malibran's turn came along: she could not be forgotten. As soon as her name was announced, "Oh, hats off for her!" Mme. Dejazet exclaimed at once, and took off her ribboned hat: then, as she stepped forward, and the house saw that she was going to sing, the tale goes that the whole audience rose to its feet of its own accord, and, standing upright, listened to this tag, the intention of which was better than the verse, and, despite the bad poetry, cheered it with a storm of wild applause:—

Oh, young and fair, on a foreign shore,
Our Malibran has met her doom:
There was none like her: she lives no more,
And England wished to keep her tomb.
And Manchester thought: to her we'll cling:
Her shade must over Death prevail;
The phœnix and the nightingale
Will rise up from her grave and sing.

And, again, twenty years later, at another theatre, homage well meant, but of a different, queer, not to say irksome sort, was paid to her memory. At Rome (then under the rule of Pope Pius IX) one day the advertisement was plastered on the walls of the *drammatica*

compagnia romana Luigi Domeniconi, thus announcing the production of a new (*nuovissimo*) play to be performed by this company :—

MARIA GARCIA MALIBRAN

Drama in five acts by Signor Costelli of Bologna. To be played for four nights at the Teatro del Corso. Dramatis personae: Maria Malibran—Countess Nardi—Fadette—Mlle. Sontag—de Bériot—Malibran, *her husband*[1] —Viscount Sourcour(?) — Lablache —Vincenzo Bellini—Marquess Louvois—Doctor Bellomini—Giovanni Gallo.

The conjunction of all these names was perfectly ridiculous ; and it was particularly hateful to put Charles de Bériot, Mme. Malibran's second husband, on the stage whilst he was still alive. Anyhow, this is what a Frenchman who was then at Rome wrote on the subject to a Paris paper :—

"I was attracted by so many well-known names and wanted to see this drama by a Bolognese poet. Frankly I thought it second-rate, and I do not know whether the last scene on your Boulevard du Temple would have

[1] "De Bériot-Malibran *son mari*." This looks as though it were the husband of de Bériot. The editor must have been at fault.

accorded with Parisian taste. But it is not a matter of my liking, and I will only describe quite briefly how the characters were drawn.

"Naturally, Maria Malibran was put on a pedestal. This is only right; and the author only says of this wonderful woman what all of us who had the luck to see her also think. Lablache also is idealized in superlative terms, and de Bériot is as amorous as any character at a Gymnase play. To make up for this, poor Mme. Sontag is outrageously vilified. The author turns her into a monster, whom professional envy and feminine jealousy so degrade that she becomes an eavesdropper. This is untrue and base. Henriette Sontag, a gentle, kindly and charming person, the fellow, not the rival, of Maria Malibran, had a title to be her friend.

"As to her wretched husband, that's another story altogether. They have turned him into a real melodramatic villain. The actor who took this ugly part wore moustaches a yard long, his face was blackened and not merely greased, had a mask, and a long cloak on, for all the world as if it were the get-up of a brigand-chief. But what is your opinion of staging contemporary events, and persons, some of whom only died the other day, and others are

still alive, under their names, and this, too, in the sacred city, where the priests control the police and the censorship? Such an exhibition of *actuality*, I thought, ought to be bruited abroad to your numerous readers in all parts."

No doubt, this peculiar play, which rendered honour in very bad taste, was only ephemeral. I cannot trace it anywhere else. It disappeared as swiftly—as suddenly as did she who was the heroine of it.

But no, "no time for lamentation now." "Nothing is here for tears." For, as the ancients said, those whom the gods love die young. What can one say of this lovable woman, save that she did well to die in her time of spring, in the flower of her grace, with all the strength of her youth, her beauty and her genius? Is not this fact, together with that of her genius, one of the causes of her astounding fame? Does not this fate, in the eyes of posterity, garland her young forehead with an aureole ever glorious and pure? Can we imagine la Malibran old, pallid, worn out, devoid—as are so many, whose examples we see every day—of the power of retiring timely from her field of triumph, of withdrawing from the acclamation of the multitude, and the

excitement of a career unmatched by any other, which, if prolonged beyond due measure, would only have diminished and impaired that stupendous brilliancy? Théophile Gautier, as ever, austere and implacable, said "she had the genius to die young."[1] Gautier was right; he was speaking as a poet. The glory of Maria Malibran shone out the more resplendently because time never had the opportunity of tarnishing and dimming it, because the wonder-working artist was struck down at the height of her powers, which she might never have been able to increase, when she might never have been able to surpass herself. We may bewail her, I repeat, but must not pity her. Fate, blind and blundering as it is, was never wiser or more inspired than in the choice of the hour at which to lay low this woman, cherished, petted and admired by one and all.

Somehow it seems as though Garcia's noble daughter had a sense, a foreboding, of an early death. Her fits of melancholy, they say, had no other cause; and her manner of using up her life, exhausting her strength, indulging herself without restraint or measure;

[1] Feuilleton to *La Presse*, October 19, 1842, referring to Pauline Garcia's first performance in *Semiramide* at the Théâtre Italien. (She was Madame Viardot.)

as it were, quaffing long draughts of a life which, she felt, must be short, so as to relish anyhow all of its pleasures; all she did seems to justify what is told of her way of living. Countess Merlin—and there are others—said of this aspect of her life: "One of the strangest features in Maria's life is the agreement between her early death and her presentiments of a short flight of earthly existence. This conviction of hers, that with her, life spelled youth, made her seek out every device to preserve the enjoyments of childhood, and the wild frolic of our young days. She was sure she would die in the flower of her life; and her aversion from this gloomy thought, which had all the strength of reality for her, explains some features in her career, which, otherwise, might be insignificant or laughable."

As to these fits of melancholy, a deep trace of them may be detected in certain of her letters, for instance, in this one which she wrote to a friend in April, 1831: she was then scarcely twenty-three years old:—

"So many women envy me! But what for? Only my ill-starred good luck.

"You know perhaps? My fortune is Juliet,

and is dead, like her; and I am Romeo and weep over her tomb.

"I have in my soul a stream of tears, rising from a pure source; and these will water the flowers on my tomb, when I shall be no more of this world. Maybe, the next will recompense me, up yonder in the skies.

"But I must dismiss these grave-thoughts. Just now they are corpse-like. . . . Death stands and heralds them; soon he will stand over me.

"Excuse me, my pen is wandering; I am crying and consoling myself by making you the confident of my inmost thoughts. . . .

"But you won't be angry, will you?

"No, you cannot.

"Come and tell me yourself you can pity me.

"Come at once. We will talk, and shall be in the other world, and I will lock the gate on this one. . . ."

This shows what was sometimes her condition and how intense the sorrow was that sometimes invaded her heart. She had seen her inner life broken up by an unhappy marriage, and I have had occasion to point out to what a degree this thought envenomed her life, obsessed her, and how she had to try to

get out of so horrible a position. That was one of the causes of her moral dejection. But sometimes the spirit of youth would reassert its rights ; and then, as we saw, she was all pranks, jollity, endless fun, full of charming whims, and outbursts of mad mirth. This comes out in this fragment of another letter, the last phrase of which is very lovable :—

"You are right ; bring the German paper along and we will read it together : *it always wants two to get through a German paper.* For instance, I believe we shall let it lie on the table, and will do better than read it ; we will make one up, all in the tiny world in which we live : . . . you know which.

"Good-bye : I must run away, run away from paper which would tempt me until I never left off writing. Do you know why I feel so bright? The weather is fine, *and I feel it is making spring-time in myself as well.*"

There was in Marie Malibran—as in all women, only perhaps more of it in her—something enigmatic and unplumbed, indefinable and mysterious, which inserts her figure with a special light, and confers on her character an undeniable originality. She was extraordinarily attractive, and had the rare and precious gift of

arousing sympathy at sight, and sympathy in the highest degree. All who met her yielded to this spell ; no one could withstand the charm. People felt there were in her such stores of goodness that she stirred up deep affection, which became a sort of devotion. What her talent started, her heart completed, and admiration then expanded into a boundless adoration. There are beings so constituted that their sway creates itself, without effort, and utterly irresistible. Marie Malibran was one of such.

One thing that astonishes me is that no writer up to now has been drawn by this ideal figure and has striven to trace the life of the enchantress who shook the hearts of Europe for ten years, and—to employ a commonplace metaphor—dragged Europe after her chariot wheels. For my own part I have long been possessed by this desire, and had formed it, long before I made a pious pilgrimage to the cemetery at Laeken, to visit the rather ugly monument which marks the spot enshrining her remains : inside the vault every year numbers of admirers born after her generation do their homage by showering down their visiting cards at the foot of the statue. The cards rustle and almost garnish the ground.

After studying her life, I felt I had to make

it live again, make it known, which means make her loved. And, if any blame the book which I have dedicated to her for showing too keen a sympathy for the woman, and a too fiery enthusiasm for the artist, I can simply reply that, as artist, I have never known any greater; whilst the woman appeared to me as one of the noblest creatures that could be dreamed of. Further, I have tried, in writing this book, never to depart from fact: and if the painter sometimes proved the panegyrist, the fault lies in the grandeur of the model. Unhappily there are few such figures to draw, so attractive and so accomplished.

APPENDIX

I

Mme. Malibran's Dramatic Repertory

This is a complete list of the operas in which Mme. Malibran sang in the course of her career :—

L'Amante astuto, by Garcia. New play.
Amelia, by Lauro Rossi. New play.
L'Assedio di la Rochelle, by Balfe. New play.
Il Barbiere di Siviglia, by Rossini.
I Capuleti ed i Montecchi, by Bellini.
Cenerentola, by Rossini.
Clari, by Halévy. New play.
Il Crociato, by Meyerbeer.
The Devil's Bridge, by Balfe. New play.
Don Giovanni, by Mozart.
La Donna del lago, by Rossini.
L'Elisir d'amore, by Donizetti.
Fidelio, by Beethoven.
La Figlia dell' arciere, by Coccia. New play.
La Figlia dell' aria, by Garcia. New play.
La Gazza Ladra, by Rossini.
Giovanna Grey, by Vaccaj. New play.
Giulietta e Romeo, by Vaccaj.
Ines di Castro, by Persiani. New play.
Irene o l'Assedio di Messina, by Pacini. New play.
The Maid of Artois, by Balfe. New play.
Maria Stuarda, by Donizetti.
Il Matrimonio segreto, by Cimarosa.
Matilda di Shabran, by Rossini.
Norma, by Bellini.
Le Nozze di Figaro, by Mozart.
Otello, by Rossini.

Appendix

La Prova d'un' opera seria, Gnecco.
Romeo e Giulietta, by Zingarelli.
Semiramide, by Rossini.
La Sonnambula, by Bellini.
The Student, by Chelard.
Tancredi, by Rossini.
Tebaldo ed Isolina, by Morlacchi.
Torvaldo e Dorliska, by Rossini.

II

Mme. Malibran's Compositions

Mme. Malibran wrote and published a considerable number of works—romances, songs, Tyrolese songs, nocturnes, etc., which she herself sang. Some obtained a great vogue. I could not presume to say I have drawn up a complete list, as many of these pieces have now vanished, being either out of print, or the plates destroyed; but I think I have recovered and traced most of them. These are the titles:—

Addio a Nice.	
Adieu à Laure, ariette . . .	Troupenas, publisher.
Au bord de la mer . . .	Troupenas, publisher.
Le Batelier, nocturne for two voices	Troupenas, publisher.
La Bayadère, song . . .	Troupenas, publisher.
Belle, viens à moi, nocturne for two voices. Words by Mme. Desbordes-Valmore . . .	Troupenas, publisher.
Les Brigands	Troupenas, publisher.
L'Ecossais, romance . . .	Troupenas, publisher.
Enfants, ramez, special song of English sailors . . .	Troupenas, publisher.[1]
En soupirant, Tyrolese song for two voices	Pacini, publisher.

[1] Also published with English words as *Row boys, row!*

Appendix

La Fiancée du brigand, ballad .	Troupenas, publisher.
Hymne des matelots . . .	Troupenas, publisher.
L'Indifférence, nocturne for two voices	Pacini, publisher.
Je fus heureux avant de te connaître, nocturne for two voices . .	Pacini, publisher.
J'étais sur la vive fleurie, nocturne for two voices . . .	Pacini, publisher.
Lève-toi, jeune enfant, song . .	Pacini, publisher.
Le Lutin, nocturne for two voices .	Troupenas, publisher.
Le Ménestrel, romance . . .	Troupenas, publisher.
Le Montagnard, Tyrolese song .	Troupenas, publisher.
Le Moribond[1]	Troupenas, publisher.
Le Message, romance . . .	Troupenas, publisher.
Les Noces du marin, song . .	Troupenas, publisher.
Le Page de la dame du châtel, ballad	Pacini, publisher.
La Pensée, Tyrolese for two voices. Words by Mme. Desbordes-Valmore	Pacini, publisher.
Prière à la Madonne, romance .	Troupenas, publisher.
Le Prisonnier, romance for two voices. Words by Béranger .	Pacini, publisher.
Rataplan, song	Troupenas, publisher.
Les Refrains, romance . . .	Troupenas, publisher.
Le Rendezvous, nocturne for two voices	Troupenas, publisher.
La Résignation, romance . .	Troupenas, publisher.
Le Retour de la Tyrolienne . .	Pacini, publisher.
Le Réveil d'un beau jour, song .	Troupenas, publisher.
La Tarentelle, song . . .	Troupenas, publisher.
Le Village, song	Troupenas, publisher.
La Voix qui dit : je t'aime, romance.	Troupenas, publisher.

Some of the pieces in this list were published in an album, one year after the singer's death, in a collection called *Dernières pensées musicales de Marie-Félicité Garcia de Bériot* (Troupenas). This collection was the subject of

[1] Also published with Italian words, and called *La Morte*.

an article by Berlioz in the *Revue et Gazette musicale* (July 2, 1837).

Ricordi, the Milanese publisher, in 1837, published (a few months after her death) a piece she had composed and added to *L'Elisir d'amore* (of Donizetti): *Aria finale nell' Elisir d'amore composta da Madame Malibran, e ridotta dal maestro Panizza per pianoforte e canto.*[1]

III

Bibliography on Mme. Malibran

Up to now there has been no complete study or work on Mme. Malibran's life; but in France, Italy and England, especially just after her death, a number of pamphlets and writings of all sorts came out, in prose and verse, which it would be impracticable now to collect. Even this list makes no claim to be thoroughgoing, but at least mentions those I have come across.

Les Loisirs d'une femme du monde, by Countess Merlin. Paris: Ladvocat, 1838, 2 vols. 8vo, and a portrait.

La Malibran, Anecdotes, by Jules Bertrand. Paris: Librairie du *Petit Journal*, 1864, 12mo, 12 pp. A portrait.

Maria Malibran, by Ernest Legouvé. Paris: Hetzel, 12mo, 48 pp.

A Marie Malibran. Ode, signed C.-G. P. Naples: Rusconi, 1832, 12mo, 25 pp.

Cenni biografici di Madama Maria Garcia Malibran. Venice, 1835, 8vo.

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[1] A Tyrolese song by Mme. Malibran, with variations for the violoncello, and piano accompaniment, has been published by Jules Forest: dedicated to Franchomme.

Appendix

Notizie biografiche di M. F. Malibran, raccolte e pubblicate da Gaetano Barbieri. Milan, Stella, 1836, 8vo, 54 pp. A portrait.

Madama Malibran e il suo secolo, Cenni biografici. Lucca: Pasquinelli, 1836, 8vo.

A Maria Malibran, per la sue rappresentazione dell' "Otello" in San Carlo. Ode di V. C. Naples, 16mo, 15 pp.

In morte della celebre Maria Malibran de Bériot. In verse. Brussels: 1836, 8vo.

The Life of Madame Maria Malibran de Bériot, interspersed with original anecdotes and critical remarks on her musical powers. Isaac Nathan. London, 1836, 12mo.

Sermon . . . on the day after the funeral of Madame Malibran. Richard Parkinson. Manchester, 1836, 8vo.

Templeton and Malibran, Reminiscences of those renowned Singers, with original Letters and Anecdotes. London: William Reeves, 1881, 8vo. A portrait.

Récit de l'ovation de Mme. Malibran à Venise. In verse. By Léon de Montbeillard. Lausanne: Delisle, 1825, 8vo, 11 pp.

Züge aus dem Leben der berühmten Sängerin Maria Malibran-Garcia. Zurich, 1840, 4to. A portrait.

Lastly, during her life, and in the various Italian cities where she sang, verses on unbound sheets or loose leaves were constantly being published on her, or presented to her. Them this impermanence, doomed to destruction. Chance has brought two of these ephemeral productions into my possession, each forming a 4to sheet of four pages, and both printed at Lucca (Giusti, 1834): 1. *La Voce umane: a Maria F. Malibran.* 2. *Al genio, al merito dell' incomparabile virtuosa di canto Signora Marietta F. Malibran*, per la serata di suo benefizio. Both are anonymous. I also note in Felice

Appendix

Romani's *Liriche* a delightful little poem dedicated to her.[1]

IV

One of Mme. Malibran's Engagements

This is the text (as translated into English) of one of Mme. Malibran's engagements, with Alfred Bunn, the manager of Covent Garden Theatre, for the year 1835. This document was published in *Templeton and Malibran*, to which I have already referred :—

"Madame Malibran's Articles of Engagement.[2]

"Between us the undersigned, on the one hand, Monsieur Bunn, director of the Covent Garden Theatre in London, and on the other hand Madame Garcia Malibran, it has been arranged as follows :—

"Art. 1. Madame G. Malibran engages to sing nineteen representations in the above-named theatre, these representations to extend from the 18th May 1835 to the 1st July following.

"Art 2. For these nineteen representations M. Bunn on his side engages to pay Madame Garcia Malibran the sum

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[1] On March 17, 1837, a funeral cantata, *In morte di Maria Malibran*, was performed at the Scala at Milan : the verse was written by the poet Piazza, and the music by Coppola, Donizetti, Mercadante, Pacini and Vaccaj. I do not know whether the cantata was ever published.

[2] Translation taken from *Templeton and Malibran.*

of Two thousand three hundred and seventy-five pounds sterling in the following manner:—

"Art. 3. Three hundred and seventy-five pounds sterling, the amount of three representations, will always be paid in advance to Madame Garcia before midday on the Monday of each week during the present engagement, at her residence in London.

"Art. 4. Madame G. Malibran shall lend her name for one benefit night forming a twentieth representation, the proceeds of which shall belong entirely to the enterprise, Madame G. Malibran renouncing in advance any remuneration for this twentieth representation.

"Art. 5. In the event of Madame G. Malibran being prevented by indisposition from singing, she will inform M. Bunn, who, on this simple notice, must immediately change the bill of performance, and, as a guarantee of good faith, Madame Malibran consents to return to M. Bunn on the Saturday of each week One hundred and twenty-five pounds sterling for each representation which her personal indisposition shall have prevented from taking place.

"Art. 6. But if, from any cause whatsoever, not depending on Madame G. Malibran, the three representations of the week should not be complete, then she would have nothing to return to M. Bunn.

"Art. 7. Madame G. Malibran engages to sing Bellini's *Sonnambula* and *Le Nozze di Figaro*. With regard to the choice of any other works that may be proposed to her, it will be made by mutual consent between Madame G. Malibran and the entrepreneur, according to reciprocal arrangements.

"Art. 8. Madame G. Malibran must be in London by the 15th May 1835, so as to be able to commence on the 18th of the same month.

"Art. 9. The theatrical costumes will be charged to the administration, and will be selected by Madame G. Malibran.

"Art. 10. Before, or during the continuance of the present engagement, Madame G. Malibran shall not exercise her talents in any theatre in London; but she reserves to herself the right to sing in any public or private concert, as

also those given in the little salle at the Haymarket Opera House, Argyll Rooms, Hanover Square, and generally in all places where concerts may be given.

"Art. 11. If the above-declared conditions are not strictly kept, Madame G. Malibran reserves the right of breaking the contract. Even in this case, M. Bunn would not the less owe to Madame G. Malibran One hundred and twenty-five pounds sterling for each representation that should have been effected.

"Art. 12. The representation agreed to by Madame G. Malibran for the benefit of the entrepreneur shall not be given except at the end, and as a complement, of the nineteen others.

"Mutual and *bona-fide* transaction between the undersigned.

"Maria F. G. Malibran.
"A. Bunn."

V

Mme. Malibran's Tomb

The great cemetery at Laeken is full of memories, and in one of the long avenues may be seen the tomb of Maria Malibran, near that of another great artist, Marie Pleyel. The tomb is in the shape of a chapel, and contains a statue of the great singer by William Geefs, one of the most celebrated Belgian sculptors. This is a description of the monument, taken from a paper of 1843:—

"The statue of Madame Malibran which was to be seen at the last Exhibition, carved by William Geefs, has been placed in the mausoleum that M. de Bériot has put up in the cemetery of Laeken, to eternize the memory of his wife and

the famous singer. The monument is three metres long each side, five metres from base to top, and is made in a very simple tumular form. The interior is circular, and crowned by a cupola. The front has a gate in front with open iron-work, through which the statue may be seen, standing at the opposite end between the centre and the circumference. This fine piece of marble, the designer of which sketched the plan of the mausoleum, stands out against the dark background with painted tapestry, so that Mme. Malibran, represented as rising from her grave, is darting up singing to heaven, and is received by a choir of angels who are painted on the cupola. In the centre of the cupola is a lantern which sheds a, one might say, celestial light on the whole statue." [1]

It might be added that on the socle of the statue (which is draped with long robes, with the head surmounted by a star) this inscription may be read :—

TO THE MEMORY OF

MARIE FÉLICITA GARCIA DE BÉRIOT,

and below is the quatrain of Lamartine, with which I began the book :—

Béauté, génie, amour, ce furent son nom de femme,
Ecrit dans son regard, dans son cœur, dans sa voix !
Sous trois formes au ciel appartenait cette âme,
Pleurez, terre, et vous, cieux, accueillez-la trois fois !

[1] *Revue et Gazette musicale*, January 1, 1843. Some years before this date (on November 4, 1838) the same

Unluckily, this monument has neither style nor elegance, is heavy, big and ungraceful, and scarcely lets enough light pierce the open iron-work of the gate to show Mme. Malibran's statue, which in my opinion ought to rear itself up radiantly in the open air, and seem to be rising triumphantly heavenwards. The mausoleum is not only dreary, but also gloomy and lugubrious, and in no way responds to the ideas of artistic enthusiasm which is aroused in the mind of the onlooker by the glorious name of Maria Malibran.

VI

The Facts attending Mme. Malibran's Death and Burial

"Mme. Malibran de Bériot, the highly-gifted vocalist, who has caused such sensation in the musical world by her extraordinary powers of voice, we regret to announce breathed her last at the Mosley Arms Hotel, Manchester, on Friday night last. Mme. Malibran was engaged to sing at the Manchester, Norwich, Worcester,

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paper published this news: "The monument which is to be erected at the Scala Theatre to Mme. Malibran, where her matchless voice so often rang out, has just been finished by Marchesi, one of the first sculptors of Italy. The bust of the great artist is placed on a white pedestal, on which the different rôles which rendered her career illustrious are carved. The genius of melody, lyre in hand, is represented resting against the pedestal in a melancholy posture." This monument stands in the public *foyer* of the Scala Theatre.

and Liverpool festivals successively, and commenced her professional tour at the Manchester festival in tolerably good health; but at the concert at the theatre in that town she was suddenly taken ill, and was obliged to be removed to the Mosley Arms Hotel. . . . She was attended immediately by Doctors Bardsley, Hall[1] and Worthington, who remained in attendance upon her until Sunday, when her own physician, Doctor Bellomini, from the Quadrant, Regent Street, who had been sent for by M. de Bériot, arrived at the hotel. Her complaint was inflammation arising from premature confinement. Up to the time of the arrival of Doctor Bellomini, Mme. Malibran continued gradually declining. On Sunday morning last, for the first time since her indisposition, she was assisted from her bed to a chair for a few minutes, but appeared much exhausted from the effort it called forth. On Thursday she appeared better, but in the course of the day a relapse which alarmed the physician, induced him to call in Mr. Lewis, a surgeon. On the morning of the evening of her death she was much worse, and lay in a state of great exhaustion, apparently unconscious of everything around her, and but little hopes were entertained of her recovery. On the arrival of the surgeon, Doctor Bellomini asked him whether, in his judgment, Mme. Malibran's state of pregnancy materially affected her in her

[1] In a subsequent notice he is spelled Hull.

disorder, but Mr. Lewis thought it did not, as she was in an early and not an advanced state of pregnancy, as had been previously supposed. In the early part of the morning she took a little liquid (barley-water) from her husband, but she was incapable of speaking. By nine o'clock at night, not the slightest hopes were entertained of her recovery, and indeed her death was almost momentarily expected, and the melancholy event took place precisely at twenty minutes before twelve, up to which period she had continued to sink without regaining her faculties for a moment. M. de Bériot [1] was so much affected at his loss, that his friends deemed it advisable to withdraw him from the town. The event is felt particularly by the people of Manchester, as throwing a shade over the festivities and gaities of the past week; and it is the more to be regretted, that many consider she has fallen a sacrifice to her desire to please, by attending the concert when the state of her health in the evening became such as to render it dangerous. We understand that she feared her indisposition would be deemed to be only feigned, and went out to the last performance in spite of her own conviction that it might be prejudicial to her health." (*Times*, Monday, September 26, 1836.)

This was the first obituary notice in the

[1] Doctor Belluomini wrote to the *Morning Post* attesting de Bériot's serious condition.

Times of Mme. Malibran's death. It should be supplemented by Mrs. Novello's letter (October 17, 1836); and on the 20th an Italian sonnet to her was published by S. P. Janer. On the 30th September, the *Times* reprinted a longer account from the *Manchester Guardian.* It adds: "We have already noticed the fact that M. de Bériot, just before quitting Manchester, gave to Mr. Beale a written authority[1] to conduct the whole of the funeral arrangements in such manner as he should deem consonant with the feeling of her friends."[2] Accordingly, an official funeral at Manchester was arranged, Sir George Smart, Alfred Bunn, and others acting as pall-bearers. As de Bériot was already in Antwerp, no instructions could be received from him. The funeral took place on Saturday, October 1, 1836; and the remains were buried in the Collegiate Church. There were some rumours of improper treatment of the illness, which were promptly squelched;

[1] "I hereby authorize Mr. Beale to superintend to [the] burial of Madame de Bériot. I wish her to be interred in a respectable manner, in a situation he approves of. Also a small tablet to be erected to her memory. It is my desire that no persons may be admitted to take likenesses or casts, or otherwise." Manchester 24 7^{bre} 1836.—C. DE BÉRIOT.

[2] The *Times* adds a comment: "It will be seen that this poor lady had no medical practitioner of eminence to attend her, when such attendance was most essential. We are assured by letters from Manchester that this remark is generally made . . .: and further that the absence of M. de Bériot and his leaving the remains of his wife to be consigned to the grave by *strangers*, is everywhere spoken of with disgust and bitterness."

but Doctor Belluomini wrote a letter with full explanation in the *Morning Post*, dated October 4, 1836: he also justified de Bériot's desertion as unavoidable if his life were to have been saved. On September 27, de Bériot sent an authenticated letter from Brussels intimating his wish to have his wife interred at Brussels. Mr. Beale replied, "that the body had been interred, accompanied with every mark of respect, which could accompany the last obsequies of the deceased, the borough-reeve of the town being the chief mourner; and that the corpse rested in a Catholic place of sepulchre, the burial service according to the rites of the Church of Rome having first been performed by a priest of that faith; and that under the circumstances nothing further could be done." The name was carved as Maria *Felicia.*

In the *Manchester Guardian* of Wednesday, quoted in the *Times* of Friday, October 21, 1836, it is stated that Mr. J. Macvicar, the borough-reeve of Manchester, had received an earnest letter of supplication from de Bériot; whilst the Festival Committee were interesting themselves in the proposed exhumation, which could only be effected by a faculty granted by the chancellor of the diocese, provided no *caveat* were entered against it. But when the Festival Committee met they passed the following resolution: "That M. de Bériot, having hastily quitted this town, immediately on the death

of Mme. Malibran de Bériot, without having provided for the interment or disposal of the body, otherwise than by a written request to Mr. Beale to inter the same where he should think fit ; and this committee having co-operated with Mr. Beale to conduct the interment in such a manner as to evince their deep feeling on the occasion of a foreigner being left without her relations to attend her last rites, and their sense of her high professional merit, and the funeral having been conducted in all its circumstances in accordance with these sentiments, and the body deposited in a situation liberally granted for the purpose by the Warden and Fellows of the Collegiate Church, this committee are of opinion that the disinterment and removal of the body would be in direct opposition to the wishes, and utterly repulsive to the feelings, of the public at large, as well as an ungracious return for the honours paid to the late Mme. Malibran de Bériot."

This rather elephantine regard to public proprieties did not meet with universal approval ; but de Bériot, in his reply, refused to be affronted, and forwarded a formal application to the Bishop of Chester. The committee entered a *caveat* against the granting of the faculty, for which M. de Fiennes applied on Thursday, October 3. Meantime there were ugly rumours floating about, which no doubt may account for the ill-will shown by the Manchester authorities. A memorial was signed

against the removal; and it was discovered that the ordinary had no jurisdiction over the Collegiate Church. Feeling may have abated, but one of the Manchester party could still write: "M. de Bériot surely cannot suppose that seven hundred respectable gentlemen of Manchester and its neighbourhood (including the civil and ecclesiastical authorities of the town, and the noblemen and many of the gentlemen who followed his wife's corpse to the grave) would enter into a warfare against his feelings if they believed those feelings to be sincere. But they do not believe this, and M. de Bériot must not attempt to play with the feelings of Englishmen. . . ." And slanders that Mme. Malibran's divorce was not legal began to gain ground.

After eleven weeks' unsavoury controversy in the Consistorial Court, disinterment was granted on Mme. Garcia's application, the faculty being transferred to her name; the order is dated 17th December, 1836.

Both in view of the tremendous public interest aroused by this unfortunate dispute at the time, and to attempt some justification of the conduct of the Manchester authorities, this appendix may not be altogether out of place.

L. A. M.

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